Max Weber and William James:
‘Pragmatism’, Psychology, Religion*

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Abstract
The essay takes up an aspect of German-American relations first raised by Eduard Baumgarten and Wilhelm Hennis. Unlike them, it argues that Weber and James were in any simple sense cultural opposites, basing this finding upon an examination of the two men’s views on religion, psychology and ‘pragmatism’. However, James seemed to correspond well to Weber’s idea of Anglo-American Kultur, and any perceived difference certainly did not imply low esteem. Nonetheless, there is a warning here against too simple or unreflective a view of Weber’s undoubted enthusiasm for things American and English; and a reminder that for Weber Kultur could be read both as international and as national.

Keywords: Max Weber, polytheism, ‘pragmatism’, psychology, rationality, religion, William James.

* This essay would hardly exist without the provocation and stimulus supplied by Wilhelm Hennis, and so I offer it to him, with grateful thanks for our occasional correspondence over a number of years. He will not (I fear!) accept my conclusions, but the principles of fruitful debate and difference are part of the air he breathes. I may add, however, that when I told him of my interest in this subject, he stated that he might wish to qualify some of his ideas: ‘Nur der Webersche Begriff des spirituellen “Antriebs” zu einer bestimmten Lebensführung verdankt mit Sicherheit einiges den Anregungen von James’ wunderbarem Buch.’ (Letter of 6.9.2001.) Any references here to his printed writings must be taken with this caveat in mind.


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One of the most intriguing vignettes in the Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism (PESC) is its testimony to Max Weber’s intellectual engagement with William James. The two men had met in Boston at the end of October 1904, and on his return home Weber set down a vigorous paragraph in Part II of the PESC discussing James’ most famous work, The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) [XXI, p. 25 n. 48]. This was then followed by a discussion in a review article of 1909 which contains at least an indirect critique of James’ Pragmatism (1907), a text Weber had almost certainly read. The entry in the PESC led Wilhelm Hennis to claim a unique significance for James’ Varieties in shaping Weber’s development after the PESC through to the ‘Economic Ethics of the World Religions’: ‘in our view it is indeed the sole usable philosophical support for Weber’s new beginning’ after 1905.

1. The record of the meeting comes in ‘The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism’, GARS I, p. 213 n. 1. (As to the precise date, I am indebted to the chronological reconstruction of Professor Larry Scaff who suggests 30 October as most likely.) It should be borne in mind that this essay was almost certainly drafted in the years c. 1906–1908 (on which dating see my ‘Max Weber in the Netherlands 1903–1907’, Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden 119 [2004], pp. 358-77, here p. 366 n. 28); thus all Weber’s significant references to James fall within a strictly limited timespan: 1905–1909. There is a real contrast here with Thorstein Veblen—a genuine American surprise for Weber—who would remain a significant point of reference throughout his life.

2. Citations of this type in square brackets in both text and notes come from the original 1904–1905 text of the PESC in AfSS volumes 20 (XX) and 21 (XXI). For convenience I reproduce the note on James in the Appendix excerpt 2, MWS, this volume pp. 277-79.

3. See the excerpt from the review of Adolf Weber (no relation), Die Aufgaben der Vokswirtschaftslehre als Wissenschaft (1909), also translated in the Appendix: AfSS 29 (1909), pp. 615-20 (619-20). (Hereafter ‘Review of Adolf Weber’). Besides referring to a number of scientific authors discussed by James who are not mentioned by Adolf Weber (see below, nn. 42-43), Weber’s reference to ‘cash-value’ in English is also clear evidence that he had been reading Pragmatism for himself, since his source only uses the German ‘Barwert’. Though Weber did exaggerate his learning in some ways, he would not invent a textual original which he had not seen. This point is established comprehensively by the text of the PESC where Weber is confronted by a vast array of sources both in the original languages and in translation: at no point does he try to invent an original when only the translation is present.

4. W. Hennis, Max Webers Wissenschaft vom Menschen (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1996), p. 53; cf. the entire discussion pp. 50-71, or the translation by Keith Tribe, Max Weber’s Science of Man (Newbury, Berkshire, UK; Threshold Press, 2000), p. 49, and pp. 46-65. (Hereafter ‘Tribe’). I pass over an oddity in Professor Hennis’ chronology: how could James have been so vital to a new start made after the PESC, if Weber read him during its composition? As we shall see, Weber certainly knew about the Varieties before
Now it is clear that Weber recognized James as intellectually significant—that he should devote a quarter of his 1909 review to a brief reference in an 80-page pamphlet illustrates this clearly enough. The PESC also shows that he had read (or coursed through) the Varieties in English, and was (like so many readers) deeply interested by James’ lavish reproduction of first-hand testimonies regarding religious experience, as also by some of his detailed findings, such as the incommunicable nature of mysticism. (This point is repeated in ‘Hinduism and Buddhism’). But the claim made for James as a profound and formative influence, however attractive it may seem to us today, is not sustainable. Indeed on any general measurement he represented an intellectual and cultural opposite to Weber.

Consider first the manner of Weber’s encounter with James. By and large Weber found in America what he expected to find, even if his expectations were a good deal more capacious and deeply considered than those of the ordinary visitor. James was no exception to this rule. We cannot say exactly when Weber read the Varieties—perhaps it was only in 1905—but for purposes of general orientation he knew quite as much as he needed to about James before he set sail for the New World in August 1904, because his travelling companion on the way to the St Louis Congress of the Arts and Science was Ernst Troeltsch. If Weber ever had a close intellectual confidant, then Troeltsch in the years c. 1903–1912 was that man, and his (pre-prepared) address to the Congress took the antithesis between James’ new psychology of religion and Kant’s established philosophical theory of religious knowledge as its central frame of reference. Indeed the very opening of the he went to America; but the statement remains interesting as a reflection of its author’s secular viewpoint, so that (if I am not mistaken) the PESC remains a stumbling block for him.

5. Note too the elementary bibliographical homage in Briefe 2.11.12 (to Jaspers).
6. MWG 1/20, p. 529.
7. A serviceable translation of what Troeltsch said in St Louis appeared as ‘Main Problems of the Philosophy of Religion: Psychology and Theory of Knowledge in the Science of Religion’, in Howard J. Rogers (ed.), Congress of the Arts and Science (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1905–1907), I, pp. 275-88. This text was undoubtedly prepared before the voyage. Note in addition: (ii) his review of the Varieties in the Deutsche Literaturzeitung (10 December, 1904), now in Ernst Troeltsch, in F.W. Graf et al. (eds.), Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1998–), IV, pp. 364-71: this was primarily expository, though the lineaments of his views can of course be detected. (iii) A much longer, revised version of the St Louis text which appeared later in German: Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie in der Religionswissenschaft (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1905). (iv) An earlier discussion of the problematic of religious psychol-
discussion in the PESC, with its striking distinction between the categories of ‘logical’ and ‘psychological’ behaviour, appears to pick up on an identical distinction made by Troeltsch at St Louis. So James was no unexpected novelty, a kind of deus ex machina inserted halfway through the composition of the PESC. (More generally the desire to split the PESC into two divergent parts, one ‘German’ and one ‘American’ should certainly be resisted.) To this may be added the broader point that ‘“psychology” (as we say today)’ was without question the most voguish of all the human or social sciences in the Germany of the 1890s, and Weber’s interest in an immense range of ‘psychologies’, ranging all the way from the naïve empiricism of Schmoller through Husserl, Dilthey and Simmel on to Lamprecht, Willy Hellpach and (at the outermost extreme) Sigmund Freud, is well attested. So the idea that James could have provoked a new and unexpected intellectual departure in a man aged 40 is most unlikely.

But in any case the central verdict in this matter is delivered by Weber’s own texts. Taken overall, the discussion in the PESC is undoubtedly a dissent from James’ views. Again, while the immediate thrust of what he writes in 1909 is a defence of James as a seeker after empirical truth, as against the vulgar conception of pragmatic truth as purely instrumental, nonetheless Weber closes his remarks by


10. A subject for a book not a note, but one obvious demonstration of Weber’s wealth of psychological reference lies in the series of essays grouped as ‘Roscher und Knies’ (1903–1906), WL, pp. 1-145. These are of course split by a whole year’s delay, including the American tour, but there is not the slightest suggestion that the latter made any difference to the underlying unity of these texts.

11. There is obvious foundation for this, not merely in James’ patent academicism

delivering a stark value judgement against ‘pragmatism’. All the same, the *Varieties* is without question the most important contemporary treatment of the meanings and psychology of religion in that Anglophone world which Weber admired so much. As such, despite all differences in approach, it is generically similar to the *PESC*, and their intersection will prove to cast light on a range of central themes: religion, rationality, psychology and ‘pragmatism’. More broadly, the very differences between the two men contribute to our understanding of what James would have called the ‘thick’ variety of German-and European-America cultural interchange at this date, and so to the question Weber himself raises: to what extent was there an ‘internationality’ of intellectual *Kultur* a century ago?12

1. Religion and rationality

William James was a psychologist and post-Christian religious believer, who used arguments from psychology to uphold the thesis that religious belief was psychologically normal; and that such normalcy was in accord with a further, avowedly ‘supernatural’ and ‘optimistic’ belief in a harmonious or ‘pantheistic’ universe (pp. 422, 520). In a famous formulation, the religious individual was ‘coterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality’ (p. 508). Social groupings, such as sects or churches, falling mid-way between the individual psyche and the universe, were of no interest to James, because of their anti-individualistic tendency to promote dull uniformity. Indeed he came close to denying that church members were religious believers at all. Churches, he supposed, ‘live at second-hand upon tradition’, and honesty — regardless of whether or not he adhered to a German conception of *Wissenschaft* — but also in such remarks as that appearing at the end of the *Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans, Green, 1902): ‘The word “truth” is here taken to mean something additional to bare value for life’ (p. 509 n. 3), even if this admission undoubtedly involves him in intellectual difficulty.

12. Review of Adolf Weber, pp. 619-20. Did Clifford Geertz learn his (very similar) usage of the term ‘thick’ from reading James?

13. Page references in brackets are to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans, Green, 1902). Naturally the William James who is presented here is William James as seen through the eyes of Max Weber, relying chiefly on the texts which we know Weber to have read, and on a Weberian conceptual agenda. Of course, the presentation even of a Weberian James cannot be wholly confined within such strict limits, but the present essay is intended as a contribution to our understanding of Max Weber, and so to one, rather unusual aspect of James’ reception in Europe; it is not a study of James in his own right.

whereas his definition of religion was confined to ‘the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude’ (pp. 30-31) or, more exclusively still, the religious ‘genius’ (p. 6). Sects (insofar as the category existed at all) were only to be praised insofar as they represented a step on the road to dissolution of corporate bodies such as churches (p. 7); but commonly they were (in accordance with a common English usage) embodiments of narrowness and external constraint. Truly authentic religious belief began in the feelings and instincts of the ‘subconscious self’ (p. 511 cf. p. 431). Not only did James uphold the primacy of ‘the subconscious and non-rational’ in the religious realm, but it was for him a fundamental principle that the facts of religion could be not be perceived or proven by the methods of ‘rationalism’, that is, ‘(1) definitely statable abstract principles; (2) definite facts of sensation; (3) definite hypotheses based on such facts; and (4) definite inferences logically drawn’ (pp. 73-74). There were instead only ‘quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended’ (p. 64), that is, psychical phenomena. (James was involved with the spiritualist English Society for Psychical Research almost from its launch in 1882, and was a founder member of its American cousin in 1884.) In short he freely accepted that most of what he advanced could not be proven by orthodox scientific means, and that at best it stood on the borderlines of academic ‘science’ or Wissenschaft. Accordingly he held that all authentic religious experience was ‘mystical’; the intellectual argument and abstraction associated with ‘rationalism’ was, it was implied, hardly true religion at all, however theistic its form. Given the psychological normalcy of religious faith and a supposedly increasing perception throughout history of underlying harmony within the universe, James held that religion was indeed ‘rational’ rather than ‘rationalistic’. But for him any such rationality was necessarily a ‘eulogistic’ sentiment rather than an intellectual construction: hence the otherwise contradictory title he used in essays, ‘The Sentiment of Rationality’. To


15. In Pragmatism (1907) James held that the religious contribution of rationalism was limited to the idea of men’s ‘right ever and anon to take a moral holiday’, something he found acceptable but evidently marginal to real religion: William James: Writings 1902–1910 (ed. B. Kuklick; Library of America, 38; New York: Library of America, 1987) (hereafter Writings 1902–10), p. 519.

16. An essay of this title appeared first in Mind in 1879; it was then grouped together with an address to the Harvard Philosophical Club of 1880 under the same
entrench this anti-intellectual style of argument still further, he took over the doctrine of ‘pragmatism’ pioneered by Charles Sanders Peirce, whereby the meaning of phenomena was to be deduced not from the arguments or intentions of those who sought to launch or justify them, but solely by their effects, a point of view James sought to apply, albeit with only partial consistency, in the *Varieties* (pp. 15-21, 444-45).

Even from such a brief exposition it will be clear that, while both inhabited late- or post-Protestant milieux, and while there might be points of contact in detail, Weber and James were opposed on most fundamental points. One simple indication of this—although here he may indeed have borrowed Jamesian terminology—lay in the fact that Weber was not religiously ‘musical’ (cf. pp. 380, 420-21); or, to put it at its very crudest, he was godless so far as his own day was concerned, whereas James was not. Weber’s reference to his meeting with James in 1904 picks up on the most obvious area of common ground on which they might have sustained a conversation: an interest in America’s religious history.17 However, they sought to do very different things with it. (Weber seems to have had but little interest in the meeting, whilst James forgot it entirely.) For Weber religious history was a crucial force shaping the godless world of the present, and the transition from a godly to an increasingly godless state should not obscure this. Even in the seventeenth century, he felt that there was ‘no God’ to help the Calvinist [XXI, p. 11]—a spiritual banishment which indicates Weber’s sense of profound continuity with the past, regardless of the fact of the lapse of belief in a god. For James by contrast the religious past was both spiritually numinous and deeply reassuring. It was a continuous and unchanging stream of testimony bearing witness to the fact that all men at all times had a psychic inclination to religion; thus that the sort of religious revival he hoped to promote through the *Varieties*—though by his bookishness he remained at the mercy of the intellectualist fallacy he sought to expose—was a real possibility (p. 25).18

Another apparent parallel lay in the fact that both James and the Weber of 1904 (though much less so later) were opponents of a
title to make up the third essay in *The Will to Believe* (1897). For ‘eulogistic’: A *Pluralistic Universe* (1909), in *Writings 1902–10*, p. 726.

17. GARS, I, p. 213 n. 1.

18. James described the lectures which made up the *Varieties* as ‘my religious act’: 12 April, 1900 to Francis Morse, in *Correspondence of William James* (ed. I.K. Skrupskelis and E.M. Berkeley; Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992-2004).
'rationalism' [XX, pp. 33-35], which both men associated with a broadly conceived Enlightenment tradition running through into the nineteenth century. Yet the grounds of their opposition were themselves opposed. James shared many of the religious or metaphysical preconceptions of 'rationalist' Hegelian idealism—above all, its belief that there was an underlying divine order to the universe—and was not afraid to admit the similarity (pp. 388, 389 n. 1, 416-17). What he objected to was its intellectualism and intellectual procedure: though he accepted that there was such a thing as a living, evolutionary progress, rationalists foreshortened and schematized it. For Weber by contrast the power of rational ‘ideas’, as the note in the PESC indicates, was an essential feature which could neither be abandoned or evaded. What he objected to in enlightened rationalism was its naïve association of ‘reason’ with a pantheistic optimism founded in religious belief—the very thing that was central for James [XX, pp. 10-11, XXI, pp. 12, 108]. The godless Weber carried no torch for, but neither were his sympathies withdrawn from, religious doubters and ethical pessimists such as Carlyle [XX, p. 3], Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: but this was the trio whom James rejected as, by his standards, psychological deviants, representing ‘only peevishness running away with the bit between its teeth’ (p. 38). Weber’s idea of a rationally ordered ‘cosmos’ had no normative or ethical quality; it was the deeply ambivalent, ‘value-free’, technical juggernaut presented by the ‘steel housing’ of modern capitalism [XXI, p. 108; XX, pp. 17-18]; James’ was

19. One of the most regrettable deficiencies in the proper historical understanding of Max Weber is a near total lack of awareness that this most famous exponent of rationality and rationalization stood within a long prior intellectual tradition. Without here offering a history of European discourses about ‘reason’ and its cognates, I take it as evident that, whilst Weber objected strongly to Enlightenment ‘rationalism’ in the PESC, his own advocacy of the ‘rational’ and ‘rationality’ in Part II of the same text clearly outlined a version of European intellectual tradition and was meant to do so. This first step, largely confined to the period from the seventeenth century onwards, would then develop into his well-known perception of Occidental history in toto as a ‘universal rationalization of life’ (Vorwort, p. vii, Grundriss der Sozialökonomik, I, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1914).

20. Cf. ‘The Rural Community’ [1904], MWG I/8, p. 243 etc.

21. Weber did not make any parade of his acquaintance with Schopenhauer; but he is known to have read him at the Gymnasium (Marianne Weber, Lebensbild [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1926], p. 48 [trans. Zohn, p. 45]), and his pioneering exposition of asceticism as a response to a pessimistic, godless condition can hardly have been wholly irrelevant: cf. the casual but familiar reference in ‘Knies und das Irrationalitätsproblem’ (1905), WL, p. 77.

that of ‘the earth-soul’ which—and this was no coincidence—was an entity first propounded by another target of Max Weber’s criticism, Gustav Fechner.\(^{22}\) In the final analysis, Weber was developing the classical tradition of Western European rationalism and liberalism, where ‘reason’ remained the core structural and conceptual idea underlying a set of public structures: political institutions, religious belief and academic \textit{Wissenschaft}. For James these structures represented what he most disliked about Continental thought: his few favourable references to the ‘rational’ are of a vestigial and, in a precise sense, ‘feel-good’ quality.\(^{23}\) Despite an extensive engagement with German \textit{Kultur}, his was a very traditional Anglophone perspective, voiced by a man who was not a social thinker and who, as a result, had nothing to say about ethics and conduct in everyday life—the central concerns of \textit{PESC}.

Difference in religious belief, however profound, might have mattered less if their conceptions of the nature of religion had been more alike. (Such after all was roughly the position that Troeltsch and Weber or Peirce and James were in.) But these too were radically different. For Weber religion was nothing if not an historically conditioned entity, even down to the freakish circumstance of the alleged elimination of core religious values in his own day. As such it should be examined within a historically and territorially specific frame of reference—as in \textit{PESC} or the ‘Economic Ethics of the World Religions’. Any typological or sociological categories which might be derived thereby could not exist without this foundation: they were, quite strictly, transhistorical. James, on the other hand, had no interest in history, except in the sense that he sought to substitute a constant, biologically driven evolutionary progression in its place. For him, then, the story of religion could remain timeless: he was ‘expressly trying to reduce religion…to that minimum…which all religions contain as their nucleus, and on which it may be hoped that all religious persons may agree’ (p. 503)—an undertaking which must necessarily


\textit{23. The full sense of the gulf between James and the Continent is best conveyed by Troeltsch’s obituary tribute, ‘Empiricism and Platonism in the Philosophy of Religion’, \textit{Harvard Theological Review} V (1912), pp. 401-22. Troeltsch’s perspective was not identical with Weber’s (as we shall see), but it is a good first approximation and a fine piece of intellectual history.}
appear extremely naïve to anyone (such as Weber) who believed in the ineluctable shaping force of historicity, which was at least in part consciously formed. Another, associated difference lay in James’ belief that the study of religious belief must rest on ‘geniuses’ or outstanding individuals, whose religious qualities were in any case to be regarded as gifts—views which rendered serious study of historical and social contexts irrelevant. Such views explain what he meant by the term ‘individualism’, and why at the end of the Varieties he celebrated the fact that he had been ‘so individualistic throughout’ (p. 501).

Weber, too, was an occasional proponent of ‘individualism’ but, as he prudently remarked, ‘the expression embraces the most heterogeneous elements conceivable’ [XXI, p. 12 n. 16]. So it was in this case. Weberian ‘individualism’ meant a frank denial of the postulate common (for example) to French ‘sociology’ that communities or societies were qualitatively different to the aggregate of the individuals who made them up. However, what was denied with one hand was largely returned by the other. The individuals who interested Weber, in sharp contrast to James, were primarily ordinary or ‘everyday’ individuals rather than outstanding or exceptional ones. The ‘everyday’ and the ‘everyday man’ are central categories in the PESC; and the body of people who make up social formations were studied by Weber as collectivities just as they were by any sociologist, even if (adopting the terminology of Tönnies) he regarded these as ‘societies’ of coolly rational individuals rather than organic ‘communities’ of feeling. The psychology which interested him was ‘mass psychology’, or group psychology under the heading of ‘characterology’ [XX, p. 52, XXI, p. 91]; the capitalist spirit only made sense ‘as a mass phenomenon’ [XX, p. 20]; whilst the ‘world religions’ which interested him were confined to those ‘which have known how to gather especially great crowds of adherents about them’. So in Weber’s case an emphasis on ‘individualism’ was fully consonant with the social and historical study of institutions such as churches, and sects; in James it was not.

24. See eg. [XXI, pp. 19, 26, 27, 31, 36, 36, 73, 74, 85 n. 31, 97 n. 59].
27. Introduction to ‘The Economic Ethics of the World Religions’, AfSS 41 (1915), p. 1. Note in this context Weber’s reproach to Wilhelm Ostwald for his foolish idea that ‘socialization’ need only be studied in terms of ‘the individual’ and not the social ‘multiplicity’ (‘Mannigfaltigkeit’): ‘Energetische’ Kulturtheorien’ [1909], WL, p. 416.
This specifically mass conception of individualism is also exemplified by Weber’s conception of religious ‘musicality’—as when he refers to ‘we modern, religiously “unmusical” men’.28 I mentioned that he might well have derived the analogy between religiosity and musicality from James—it is not one he employs before his essay on the North American sects of 1906. (On the other hand a deep and ambivalent fascination with music and music history goes back to his youth.) However, for James this figure was an expression of the psychological normalcy of religious (and indeed specifically mystical) belief in a form which could not, he supposed, be challenged by rational criticism (pp. 420-21); to be atheistic or ‘rationalistic’ was the deviant concern of a tiny minority with a psychophysical deficiency, like being tone-deaf. For Weber, by contrast, lack of musicality was a cultural condition afflicting the vast mass of modern laymen, who would in his view have been religious believers in previous epochs but were not in the present. The musical analogy expressed the fact that religion was historically normal; even so, lack of musicality in the present day was also normal, albeit the epoch might be abnormal. Being tone-deaf was part of the decay of modern Kultur, and not merely the problem of a few benighted individuals. It should be added that Weber himself identified with the ‘ordinary’ group of unmusical laymen—it was an element in his ‘democratic’ tendencies—and when he refers to the ‘unmusical’ layman he is implicitly referring to himself as well.29

Equally fundamental contrasts appear when we consider the component elements into which religious behaviour was broken down. For James all authentic religion was essentially mystical, where the authentically ‘mystical’ was an oblique or intuitive awareness of the underlying harmony of the cosmos: in this sense the terms ‘cosmic or mystic’ (p. 399) were interchangeable. For Weber religious behaviour was of course to be grouped around two opposite poles, the ascetic and the mystic, though these too were associated with radically different conceptions of the ‘cosmos’.30 His understanding of mysticism as simply ‘irrational’ might appear to be the same as James’—and this is what he assumes in the PESC—but in fact the relationship of mysticism to the rational order is conceived quite differently. Weber’s reli-

29. See also Briefe 19.2.09, MWG II/6, p. 65.
30. See most obviously the Sociology of Religion §11 (c. 1913), MWG I/22-2, pp. 320-34.
gious typology hinged on the presence or absence of rationality. He conceived of mysticism as 'acosmism' [XXI, p. 54 n. 109], as having no belief in an underlying rational order, since the term 'cosmos' was taken to imply a specifically rational conception of the world and was to be equated with the rational modern society in which Occidental man lived.  

31. By contrast the mystic's irrational or 'acosmic' view of the world centred solely on the individual.  

32. Such a rigorous division between the rational and the irrational ran quite contrary to James' belief that the irrational testimonies and experiences of mystical religion were nonetheless oblique pointers towards a pantheistic harmony informed by the glow of 'rational sentiment'.  

33. For James religious experience was not to be classified in terms of anything so elusive (or else alien) as rationality, but on the solid, 'empirical' basis of psychological or pre-rational types: the healthy-minded, the sick soul, the divided and the united selves.  

Weber may have chosen to overlook this discrepancy, but his differences with James over the nature and status of rationality and the crucially linked idea of asceticism were glaring. It hardly needs saying that James did not share Weber's wholly original conception of asceticism or its relationship to modernity.  

35. He was unclear whether, as most people assumed c. 1900, asceticism was an obsolete set of religious practices, or not. Much of the time he supposed it was; thus that it was primarily a Catholic phenomenon. Indeed he went so far as to suppose that Catholics rather than Protestants were the modern exemplars of 'methodical' asceticism (p. 406 cf. pp. 297-98), although he

31. [XX, pp. 17, 41 n. 2; XXI, pp. 17, 83 n. 27, 108].  

32. It may then be asked how Weberian mystics could play any part in the 'mass' or social behaviour which (in Weber's eyes) was the essential subject matter of history and later sociology: this element was supplied by what Weber called 'the acosmism of love', or in plainer language 'brotherliness', which, contrary to deductive logic but in accord with the logic of the psyche (or psycho-logic), could generate forms of social action: MWG 1/22-2, pp. 331-32.  

33. Nonetheless the bridge between James' self-confessed 'radical empiricism' and individualism, and an ultimate belief in the harmony of all (however pluralistic) was, as he was the first to admit, an immense difficulty for him. Hence his delight when he found that Bergson had simply cut this Gordian knot. I confess I am at a loss to know why Professor Hennis (Wissenschaft vom Menschen, p. 66 [Tribe, p. 61]) supposes that Weber's idea of 'acosmism' was borrowed from James, a claim for which no evidence is cited.  

34. Varieties, Lectures IV-VIII.  

also hoped that ascetic practices might be revived by the religious geniuses of the future (pp. 367-69). In any case the idea that, as Weber supposed, ‘everyday’ people could only cope with modernity by practising a contemporary asceticism, a set of disciplined, systematic ‘practices’ or ‘exercises’ (‘Übungen’) which were nothing other than rational conduct itself, and which had long since transcended religiously literal practices based on ‘mortification’ of the flesh [XXI, p. 100]—this simply did not occur to James.36 Instead he conceived of asceticism in traditional fashion as the product of fasting or poverty, which offered a ‘doorway to the larger and more blessed life’ (p. 418). It was but one of the multifarious characteristics of ‘Saintliness’ along with peace of mind, charity, fortitude, relaxation etc. (pp. 271-72) which made up the ‘varieties’ of religious experience. As such it was merely a sub-set of universal category of mysticism: the ‘saint’ was both ‘mystic and ascetic’ (p. 46) just as ‘the moral mystery [of asceticism] intertwines and combines with the intellectual mystery of all mystical writings’ (p. 418). Given that James came from such a different starting point to Weber, it is hardly surprising that this scheme should be an outright (if unintentional) denial of the core Weberian typology of religion. In itself this did not worry or perplex Weber, although he was well able to recognize James as a man dominated by ‘mystically oriented premises’.37 Nonetheless, the Weberian polarization of asceticism and mysticism rested on a crucial substantive point, that the practice of asceticism represented the central religious impulse to rational thought and behaviour in the history of the Occident, sanctioned by an intellectually and rationally conceived theology. About this Weber cared a good deal.38 The underlying unity of asceticism and rationality is, we may say, the central argument or assumption of the whole of the second Part of the PESC. Understandably, then, it is rehearsed in Weber’s PESC note on James, and there can be no ques-

36. The ardent Jamesian might wish to make a case for the antithesis in Pragmatism between the ‘tender’- and the ‘tough-minded’ as resembling Weber’s contrast between mysticism and asceticism. However, this really meant an antithesis between rationalism and empiricism, hence between philosophical positions rather than social and religious groups. Furthermore, the aim of pragmatism was to transcend and mediate between these two, a neo-Hegelian move which has no parallel in Weber: see Lectures I and VIII, in Writings 1902–10, pp. 490-91, 605-606, 619.


38. Professor Hennis’ remark that ‘There was indeed more to the world than gloomy Protestant asceticism’ (Wissenschaft vom Menschen, p. 69, [Tribe, p. 63]) is an inimitable personal touch, but also a truly radical declaration of lack of interest in what was for Weber a central concept and a lifelong personal concern.
tion but that here there is a fundamental disagreement with James, the avowed ‘anti-intellectualist’, or in Weber’s language the ‘anti-philosophical philosopher’, who was so hostile to the autonomous power of abstract thought (of which the ‘quite unique logical consistency’ of predestination is a classical example) [XXI, p. 39]. To refer, then, to Weber’s remarks in this note as actually an extension of James’ thinking or (alternatively) as a piece of routine pedagogic correction of no great significance, can hardly be allowed.

A different facet of the two men’s religious views emerges from Weber’s 1909 remarks on James. Here the focus was on the nature of Wissenschaft or academic ‘science’—the concern of the book under review—rather than on any particular object of analysis. This raised the question of the implications for religion of recent work in an immediately pre-Einsteinian natural science. As a former experimental psychologist, James was bound to share (not to say, exceed) Weber’s interest in this area, and of the five modern scientists mentioned in Weber’s review four had been cited by James in Pragmatism (Ostwald, Mach, Clerk Maxwell, Duhem but not Kirchhoff). Conversely, it can be shown that Ostwald and Mach were figures of interest to Weber quite independently of any reading of James. In fact Weber’s assem-

39. Pragmatism, Lecture II, in Writings 1902–10, p. 510 cf. pp. 517, 572-73, 594. James’ use of the term ‘intellectualist’ covers two quite distinct meanings. On the one hand, this is a technical philosophical term, going back to Bacon, at least, indicating adherence to the doctrine that mind or intellect moves and rules reality. However, this was, to say the least, an arcane usage by 1900, and we may fairly suppose that James also intended to refer to ‘intellectuals’ in the modern sense of the term, as a(n over-) cerebral class of persons, even if he most often used ‘philosophers’ in this guise. It is true that ‘intellectual’ in this sense was almost unknown in English-speaking circles at this date (OED, V, p. ii, published in 1901, really has only one usage which remotely corresponds to it, s.v. B.4, citation from 1898); but James’ had a wide and eminently ‘intellectual’ acquaintance with the German and French thinkers, of whom Weber was also typical, who were bringing this new word to prominence, above all in the later 1890s.


43. On Ostwald ‘‘Energestische” Kulturtheorien’ (1909): WL, pp. 400-26. Weber’s interest in Mach is apparent from (e.g.) his correspondence in 1906 with Friedrich Gottl, and this may be where the first of his frequent allusions to the Machian idea of ‘economy of thought’ appear: Briefe 29.3.06 [p. 65], 8.4.06 [p. 70], 18.4.06; cf. 1.6.07. See also Weber to Eulenburg 29.6.05, Nachlaß Max Weber, 30/4 Bl.123.
bly of scientists here is simply a well-known grouping of those who at this date stood for a strict sensationalist or empiricist epistemology in natural science, and who were as a result largely committed to a physical theory based on energy and ‘energetics’ rather than to an atomic or mechanical one. So this section of the review is not simply about James, but is closely linked to the attack on Wilhelm Ostwald—an ally and even associate of James—which appeared in the same number of the Archiv and was written practically simultaneously, but by the same token, James was of interest to Weber here because he was raising similar issues. To a shared agenda may be added an important element of shared perspective, since both men were sharply opposed to naïve scientific monism—the view that there was a scientifically demonstrable uniform order running throughout inorganic and organic nature, the very last gasp of a Newtonian world-view—and both opposed to this a belief in forms of religious or Kulturpluralism in the modern day. Hence Weber’s salute to James’ ‘rejection of the postulate of a unitary world-picture (‘Weltbild’)’. Here is the obvious point at which he stands significantly closer to James than a modernizing Protestant such as Ernst Troeltsch. Given the breakdown of authoritative, dogmatically based religious doctrines—the fact that ‘modern men [could] have simply no conception any more’ of a state of affairs ‘when the afterlife was everything’ (XXI, p. 74)—any unitary view of the world could only appear in the secularized and somewhat

44. For these theorists, who like James (and with the single exception of the Frenchman Duhem) were all born before 1850, atoms could hardly be ‘sensed’; they were thus regarded as a theoretical and ‘mechanical’ postulate. It was precisely in the period under discussion, the early years of the twentieth century, that the work of men such as Einstein, Max Planck and Niels Bohr rendered much of this thinking obsolete (or obviously partial). For a text which, entirely independently of Weber and James, groups all of Weber’s names and textual references, e.g. E. Mach, ‘Die Leitgedanken meiner naturwissenschaftliche Erkenntnislehre und ihre Aufnahme durch die Zeitgenossen’, Physikalische Zeitschrift XI (1910), pp. 599-606. Even Troeltsch noted James’ empiricist link to Kirchhoff: ‘Main Problems, Congress of Arts and Science, I, p. 277.

45. Although James had known of Ostwald long beforehand, their association became much closer from 1902 onwards, both men having become interested in a kind of international scientific alliance: see e.g. R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), II, p. 463 n. 15.

46. See Briefe 3.9.09; the article on Ostwald appeared originally in AfSS 29 (1909), pp. 575-98.

47. For another version of this perspective see the splendid reminiscence by Hans Staudinger cited in Hennis, Max Webers Fragestellung (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), pp. 195-96 (Tribe, pp. 173-74).
superficial form of Weltanschauung. The Troeltschian view that a unitary religion might be re-established on the more intellectual foundations of the ‘science’ ('Wissenschaft') or (later) ‘philosophy of religion’ had no appeal to Weber; by contrast the very elasticity of James’ views had an attraction, and it is noticeable how in his earlier note on James for the PESC he had associated him with the more capacious and sympathetic idea of a Gedankenwelt or ‘thought-world’, rather than the unitary Weltanschauung [cf. XX, p. 32; XXI, p. 53].

Now Weber did not need to wait until Pragmatism to find this out, since James’ religious pluralism is clearly signalled in the Varieties. Its famous Postscript postulates that there are many gods and not one unique one: ‘the universe might conceivably be a collection of such [divine] selves...[and] thus would a sort of polytheism descend upon us’ (pp. 525-26 cf. pp. 131-33). But if Weber’s reaction in 1909 is not new, still it might appear to diverge somewhat from the sentiments of the PESC in that it seems to supply a striking case of common ground. Indeed the parallel is the more exact in that for Weber, too, denial of a unitary Weltanschauung led him to espouse ‘polytheism’ as the most logical course for secular modern man to pursue. Yet here again, despite a real element of sympathy and the use of identical terminology, the solutions which the two men reached continue to point up fundamental differences in outlook. When in later years Weber gave an intellectual pedigree to his ‘polytheism’, he traced it back to J.S. Mill and not James. Despite James’ well-known sympathy for Mill—Mill was the dedicatee of Pragmatism, the man ‘from whom I first learned the pragmatic openness of mind’—this was a very real distinction. Mill’s On Liberty—the obvious source of ‘openness of mind’—is not a religious text, just as Mill was a far more secular and ‘this-worldly’ thinker than James. This difference is reflected by the differing meanings Weber and James attach to the term ‘polytheism’. For James it meant, quite literally, positing a plurality of divine powers as the most likely religious reality; for Weber it was the more sober acceptance of what he took to be a social fact: the irreconcilable


multiplicity of values and beliefs within the everyday life of modern society. Thus Weber’s ‘gods’ were reduced to the secularized realm of ‘this-worldly “Kultur”’, and the unceasing ‘struggle between a plurality of value-series’—features which could then be used to justify the outright denial of the Christian gospels [cf. XX, p. 45-46]. Another harshly ‘realistic’ or unharmonious aspect of Weber’s polytheism was his belief that the true and the good could be divorced, and most likely were; for James they could not.51 Here again an unbridgeable gap remained between the two men.

2. Psychology

Differing conceptions of religion and rationality represent the core of Weber’s distance from James, but we should also consider two other themes central to their relation (or lack of one): their usage of psychology and understanding of ‘pragmatism’. Unlike Weber, James could of course claim considerable formal training in psychology, and this expertise was the avowed starting point for the argument of the Varieties (Lecture I). It led him to make two central claims. First that, in line with the practice of much experimental psychology (of which he was a pioneer), it was abnormal, ‘pathological’ or even ‘psychopathic’ states that were the best guide to normal psychology: ‘Morbid impulses and imperative conceptions, “fixed ideas” so called, have thrown a flood of light on the psychology of the normal will; and obsessions and delusions have performed the same service for that of the normal faculty of belief’ (p. 22).52 James’ intuitive belief in the exceptional and abnormal ‘genius’ as the quintessentially religious person and the most influential force within the evolutionary-historical process, was also at work here; but in any case he sought to derive general and normal behaviour from the exceptional, and if one aim of the Varieties was to promote religious belief, another was to found a psychologically based ‘Science of Religions’ (p. 456). A second and evidently linked idea was James’ belief in the primacy of feeling over reason within religious experience and conduct. Here again, whilst there were obvious cultural and personal factors underlying this idea, the emergence of an academically reputable science of experimental psychology in the previous 25 years had deepened this assumption by its exploration and greatly expanded conception of the non- or

51. MWG I/15, p. 98; I/17, pp. 99-100; cf. Pragmatism, Lecture VI.
52. Cf. Myers, William James, pp. 6-7, 486 n. 12.
pre-rational personality. (Rational and conscious acts by contrast were assumed to be in some sense transparent, and so hardly worth academic investigation.) The most obvious technical example of this process in James’ case was his appeal to the ‘subconscious self…nowadays a well-accredited psychological entity’ as a starting point for argument. From here he could readily infer that ‘there is actually and literally more life in our total soul than we are at any time aware of’ (p. 511). In this way the balance of the personality became weighted against the purely rational. A striking cultural index of this is that, as early as 1902, James could refer to ‘the wonderful explorations’ of Sigmund Freud and others in this area (p. 230), and within a very few years the association between Freud and James in the minds of German-speaking psychologists would seem obvious.53 (Conversely, we may suspect that the great popularity of Freudian psychoanalysis in North America in the coming generations had very real domestic roots.)

Such was the Jamesian perspective but—as the tell-tale mention of Freud suggests—it was not shared by Weber.54 His views are sketched in the PESC [XXI, p. 44 n. 79a], and are then rehearsed more fully in his replies to Karl Fischer’s criticisms of the text in 1907–1908.55 Fischer’s critique of Weber was also psychologically based, albeit based on an obsolete, pre-Jamesian conception of the subject. His premiss was that most of the phenomena the PESC purported to explain could be explained more simply and reliably by an appeal to the kind of general or deductive psychology espoused (in various ways) by J.S. Mill and Herbert Spencer. The desire for continuous monetary acquisition, for example, did not require the kind of complex historical explanation Weber offered; what the latter construed as the ‘spirit of capitalism’ was in reality but ‘the joy of the individual in his powerful activity’.56 Weber was predictably outraged by such grotesque simplicity, but it did provoke him to clarify his views on the kind of contribution to social inquiry which was open to professional

53. In the opening volume of the Freudian Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie (Halle: Carl Marhold, 1907) James is the most cited author after Freud himself: p. vii. Weber went through this tome—no doubt because Willy Hellpach appeared in it—and dismissed it in predictably brutal fashion: Briefe 13.9.07; PESC GARS, I, p. 97 n. 1.

54. For a light-hearted Weberian reference to the ‘Unterbewußtsein’ see Briefe 30.12.08. For his well-known views on Freud, Briefe, 13.9.07.

55. See also the (entirely consonant) statements in Weber to Hellpach, Briefe 20 January, 18 April, 1906.

psychology. His previous remarks in the PESC might easily be read as a position close to outright hostility, but this would be to mistake Weber’s considerable interest in the subject—an interest which is perhaps most manifest in his close engagement with the work of the distinguished experimental psychologist Emil Kraepelin (Professor at Heidelberg until 1903 before he departed for Munich, and regarded today as the first modern of the discipline) in the course of his own extended attempt to deploy and exploit psychological tools and methods in 1908, ‘Zur Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit’ (On the Psychophysics of Industrial Labour). Weber’s basic position, though it was only implicit in the original PESC (and would remain so in 1920), rested on a sharp distinction between ‘exact researches’ into pathological phenomena—features primarily displayed by individuals—and the mass behaviour of ordinary people in society or what we might call social psychology. In the first case he supposed that the specialist researches of psychologists or psychiatrists were indeed useful, even if the degree to which the research itself had proceeded was not very far. By extension, he would even admit that psychology might make a contribution to the unusual or deviant behaviour of otherwise ordinary people in social groups. For example, it was what he took to be the sheer oddity of certain forms of Pietist behaviour that caused him to invoke the work of the psychopathologist Willy Hellpach in the PESC as potentially relevant [XXI, p. 44 n. 79a]—though it was no more than that; and this concessionary gesture was one Weber repeated on several occasions throughout his life, without actually advancing upon it.57

However, such concessions to open-mindedness in questions of method should not obscure his belief in the essential polarity between the psychologies of pathological and ordinary behaviour: the one rare, and primarily confined to individuals, the other the essential basis of almost all social and historical explanation. Thus he viewed the kind of ‘generalising doctrines’ which were advanced by Karl Fischer and, still more prominently, the evolutionary psychology of Karl Lamprecht, as quite worthless when dressed up as technical and scientific dogmas: they were no more than ‘the trivialities of everyday life impre-

57. See the remarks quoted below from his second reply to Fischer, n. 65; also MWG I/4, p. 554 n. 4 (Freiburg Inaugural), and the 1920 Vorbemerkung, GARS, I, pp. 15-16. The last links psychology and anthropology, which is an additional indicator of the uncertainty and generality which attaching to the former.
cisely reproduced’. 58 Anyone (such as Lamprecht) who believed ‘in the “unitary quality” of the “social psyche” and its capacity to be reduced to a single formula’ was in no way an expert but, quite the reverse, a ‘dilettante’ [XXI, p. 110 n. 86]. Social phenomena, such as the unique rise of modern capitalism in the Occident, could only usefully be treated along specific and historical lines, and this was the nature of all the so-called ‘psychological’ argument produced in the PESC, where ‘psychological’ might also be understood in more humdrum language as the ‘individualist’ precursor to a more explicit analysis of ‘objective social institutions’ [XXI, p. 72]. (The failure to produce the latter was purely accidental.) Since ordinary behaviour could not be pinned down by specialist, academic psychology, Weber remained an adherent of what he called ‘vulgar psychology’, of a kind which most people practised whether consciously or not. 59 But this consisted essentially of the admission of ‘commonsensical’ categories such as values, emotions, purposes and needs, where any distinctive, and hence debatable, element derived from ‘philosophy’ rather ‘psychology’. That is to say, from Weber’s position as an eccentric kind of post-Kantian: in particular his belief in the essential (though by no means complete) primacy of Kultur and values; the assumption that conduct took its starting point in an absolute, and hence ‘irrational’ datum, which was then realized (if implicitly modified) by formalizing rationality; or (in yet another formulation) that there was a progression from core ‘Ideas’ to ‘interests’. 60 Furthermore, none of these categories came into play until filled out by specific historical exemplars working within social contexts. On the basis of this denial of


60. Besides PESC [XX.35; XXI, p. 25 n. 48] see the ‘Introduction’ to the ‘Economic Ethics of the World Religions’, MWG I/19, p. 101. Hence (further) the argument of the PESC that in effect values had eroded in the modern day; or Weber’s complete lack of concern about supplying any sort of theoretical basis for his crucial distinction between the realms of Macht and Kultur (cf. MWG I/8, p. 314). Though Weber’s innovative and distinctive thinking about rationality might be considered to have contained important psychological assumptions, in fact it aroused no comment from psychologists: the latter did not devote much attention to ordinary ‘rational’ behaviour since, so far as they were concerned, it was not problematic.
the relevance of general or ‘normal’ psychology in academic form he
could announce, with a degree of emphasis unusual even by German
standards, that he continued to await useful and fruitful criticism of
the PESC ‘from the theological side as the most competent’.61 Theologians
could be expected to have the kind of historically specific knowledge
that psychologists did not, whilst their ignorance of academic psy-
chology was in Weber’s view a help rather than an obstacle to under-
standing. Nor was this simply an abstract statement, since it was in
fact an allusion to Ernst Troeltsch’s famous inquiry into the Social
Teachings of the Christian Churches and Groups which was getting under
way at this very moment; and Troeltsch too was a decided advocate of
(religious) ‘philosophy’ as against ‘psychology’ in the sphere of human
conduct.62

It will be clear from all this how far removed Weber’s position was
from James’. Unlike Fischer, James earned Weber’s respect as a pro-
found and original empirical inquirer into psychological phenomena.
Nonetheless, he remained opposed to James’ central assumption, that
there existed a general psychology which was more than simply com-
monsensical. In addition, James viewed pathological and exceptional
behaviour as the most illuminating guide to, and seamlessly con-
nected with, what was normal—an assumption which was by no
means ‘vulgarly’ obvious and was quite the opposite of Weber’s.
Weber’s opposition to a third, associated premiss, the Jamesian exalta-
tion of feelings and denigration of reason, can also be derived from
his careful delimitation of the role of psychology, and the practical
exclusion of technical psychology as an explanatory instrument from
the classical Weberian spheres of rational and social conduct. Note too
that Heinrich Rickert, Weber’s obvious personal link to the rational,

61. ‘Kritische Bemerkungen’, p. 246 n. 7, reiterated ‘Bemerkungen’, p. 278. ‘Normal
psychology’ was Fischer’s wording, but was readily understood and adopted by

62. The first clear sign that Troeltsch was taking up this project dates from 28
April, 1907: F.W. Graf, ‘endlich große Bücher schreiben’, in idem and T. Rendtorff
(eds.), Troeltsch-Studien 6 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1993), pp. 30-31;
the very next day Weber announced to Siebeck that he would be submitting (what
proved to be) the first critique of Fischer, where the extraordinarily emphatic remark
about theologians has been added on as a note: Briefe 29.4.07. Chronological sequence
rarely appears in more beautiful, albeit slightly cosmetic, form—the polarity between
the ‘philosophy’ and the ‘psychology’ of religion is a central theme of Troeltsch’s
‘Empiricism and Platonism in the Philosophy of Religion’, Harvard Theological Review
V (1912), see esp. p. 409.
Kantian philosophy which squeezed out any autonomous, psychologically derived model of human conduct, was something of a bête noire to James.63 Nonetheless, it has been held that in his second reply to Fischer, composed in October 1907,64 Weber paid a most handsome tribute to James, albeit under the veil of anonymity:

If in the closing sentence of my [first] reply I spoke particularly about exact research into the pathology of religion…as perhaps significant at some point in the future for the study of specific problems, what was suggested there was something known to every informed person: namely that that ‘psychology of religion’ which treats the ‘experiential’ and irrational element in the religious process as ‘pathological’ is after all, despite all its incompleteness and hastiness, that which promises ultimately to achieve more in the future for the clarification of the ‘characterological’ effects of the specific forms of piety which we have in view here than the labours of ‘quite usual’ theologians ever can — and on occasion it already has.65

Now if we were to overlook our previous argument and assume as given what must be proven — that these remarks were directed at James — then we might detect some signs identifying James as at least one of the intended beneficiaries of this remark. Reference to the ‘experiential’ (‘Erlebnismäßige’) element in religion might suggest James’ emphasis on intense, authentic experience,66 and the latter’s description of the argument of the Varieties as ‘my pathological programme’ (p. 21) might also seem to tally with what is said here. Again, it is possible that Weber had recently been reading the German translation of the Varieties, assuming that he had read it as soon as it had been published in 1907, which would then have brought James to the forefront of his mind.67 However, if Weber was thinking of paying covert

64. He handed in the MS to Oscar Siebeck on 17 October, 1907, Briefe.
66. The term Erlebnis is not common in the PESC, but on one occasion at least it is associated with specifically mystical experience [XXI, p. 21], which might suggest a hint of Jamesian colouring in its usage.
67. E. Baumgarten, Max Weber: Werk und Person (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1964), pp. 313 and n. 1. To Baumgarten, the author of Der Pragmatismus: Emerson, James, Dewey (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1938), surely belongs the credit of initiating this whole seam of inquiry. Note, however, that the title of Wobbermin’s translation
homage to an individual here, then a homage to James could only have been based on a quite drastic misconstruction (which seems unlikely), rather than the more modest manipulation that goes with intellectual appropriation (which was common in Weber as in so many authors). As we have seen, James was offering a general psychology of religion of precisely the kind Weber identified as worthless. When taken in isolation the above quotation might seem to go counter to Weber’s emphatic reliance on theologians as against psychologists, but it is incomplete. The sequel runs as follows: ‘But of course my problems turn precisely on these latter questions’ — the work of the theologians; 68 ‘self-evidently we shall come nowhere near a truly “exact normal psychology” in any other way’. So in fact Weber is consistent throughout in favouring theology over psychology; and if there was any praise here for James it was, to say the least, hard to detect.

In fact Weber’s primary concern was to set out a clear and consistent set of intellectual preferences, with any reference to individuals coming as an adjunct or support to these. For example, when he referred to an ‘experiential’ psychology of religion, the reference to inner ‘experience’ or Erlebnis here could not possibly have been confined to James, since it was a central concept for major German authors such as Wilhelm Dilthey — someone whom Weber had already mentioned in this same text as part of the ‘not altogether inconsiderable literature’ which Fischer ought to have consulted (regardless of Weber’s obvious intellectual differences with Dilthey). 69 When he refers to psychopathological investigation, there can be little doubt that, insofar as Weber had an individual in mind here, it was Willy Hellpach, the psychopathologist named in the PESC as an exception to the generally negative view of psychologists advanced there, and when he refers to reproduced James’ Experience by the colourless German Erfahrung, rather than by the more introspective and philosophically topical term Erlebnis: Die religiöse Erfahrung in ihrer Mannigfaltigkeit (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1907).

68. Weber’s text requires this gloss to make it fully transparent in English, but there can be no doubt as to the meaning of the German ‘diese’ given the German word order. Much of the rest of the text would be a nonsense on any other reading. The translation of Austin Harrington and Mary Shields in The Protestant Ethic Debate (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001) (hereafter PESC Debate) is necessarily opaque because perplexed at this point, p. 47.

69. PESC Debate, p. 276, the reference being almost certainly to Dilthey’s Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie (1894). For a short verdict on the latter, delivered at very much the same time as the second reply to Fischer, see Weber to Rickert, Briefe 3.11.07.
‘characterology’, it is almost certainly Pietist oddity he has in mind (as in 1905). Weber would continue to co-operate with and draw on Hellpach during his work on the psychophysics of industrial labour, a set of undertakings that was just getting under way in September–October 1907,\(^{70}\) the date when the second reply to Fischer was penned. Note finally, that when Weber described his severely restrictive view of the general status of psychopathology as one ‘known to every informed person’, what this really implied was ‘all persons familiar and in agreement with the work of Ernst Kraepelin’, the man who was making a rigorous and cautious experimental psychology the dominant psychological and psychiatric tradition in Germany—the polar opposite of Freud—and whom (with a degree of licence) Weber claimed as broadly in agreement with his views.\(^ {71}\) Here indeed we reach the point at which general statements about method and personal allusion seamlessly merge; but still we may uphold the view that, whatever else was being said here, these remarks were not a secret confession of a personal debt which was at once so fundamental and yet (for some unexplained reason) could not be declared openly. Of all authors Weber was one of the most committed to a classical liberal transparency in public utterance, and the least interested in constructing a hermetic private or archival sphere apart from this.

3. ‘Pragmatism’

Lastly, we should consider Weber’s relationship to the emergent doctrine of ‘pragmatism’. This is, of course, a striking litmus test of the closeness (or distance) of his intellectual relationship with America, to set alongside his enthusiasm for American economy and society; equally importantly, the ideas of *pragma* and the ‘pragmatic’ are central elements of later Weberian discourse, which have hitherto been ignored.

70. For this chronology see *MWG* I/11, pp. 63-68; for Weber’s debt to Hellpach, see eg. the acknowledgement at the beginning of *Zur Psychophysik, MWG* I/11, p. 167 n. 1. (On the page this looks small but in fact Hellpach and Weber’s Heidelberg contact Gruhle are the only names being mentioned apart from Kraepelin.) Hennis’ speculation that one might read into the passage quoted above ‘a slight distancing from Hellpach’ (p. 52 [Tribe, p. 48]) is not supported by any evidence, though it is indeed an essential adjunct of his argument.

71. See ‘Zur Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit’ [1908–1909], §6 *MWG* I/11, pp. 218-50 for a comprehensive view. The part of Weber’s analysis that Kraepelin was unwilling to accept was the view that not only psychopathology but also ordinary psychology was as yet very limited in its scope.
It has been urged that Jamesian pragmatism found in Weber ‘a kindred spirit’ and that this was the essential ‘“specialist” authorization’ which allowed him to pursue his inquiries into the impact of religion on human conduct: it was only after reading James that he was sufficiently confident to take up the theme of the ‘practical impulses to action’ or ‘conduct’ (Handeln) supplied by religion.72 To speak thus, however, besides the implicit denigrat ion of his engagement with religion prior to 1905, misrepresents both Weber and Jamesian pragmatism, and sets up a nexus of affinity and influence where none exists. Of course, both parties believed in some kind of connection between ideas and action, and by an intriguing linguistic parallel both James (e.g. p. 20) and Weber would speak of the ‘fruits’ of religious belief. In the PESC the association between the ‘fruits’ of action and the idea of ‘pragmatism’ seems to come naturally to Weber when he remarks that ‘by remaining true to the Puritan scheme of “pragmatic” interpretation [of human conduct], one recognised the providential purpose of professional or vocational grouping by its fruits’ [XXI, p. 83 cf. pp. 23, 100]. Bearing in mind that he undoubtedly learned about the terms ‘pragmatism’ and ‘pragmatic’ from James (p. 444) — nothing like this vocabulary appears in any earlier writing — this looks like a rapid absorption of ‘Jamesian’ coloration into the text, an injection of ideas which has already floated free of its original source. Of course, the vocabulary of ‘fruits’ was a standard Protestant usage — it was particularly associated with good works that were the product of the fides efficax (efficacious faith)73 — and Weber certainly did not need to go to James to find it. But, regardless of this particular point of terminology, underlying questions remain: what sorts of connection between ideas and action did the two men entertain and what did they mean by ‘pragmatism’?

Weber did not suppose that there was a straightforward transference of ideas from (for example) the theological page into social conduct. Ideas had to be mediated before they became practical. This is why he emphasizes the ‘practical’ and the praxis pietatis74 so much, and also why he is happy to pick up on the American coinage of

72. Hennis, Wissenschaft vom Menschen, pp. 66, 60, 64 [Tribe, pp. 61, 55, 59].
73. [XXI, pp. 37 n. 74, 53 n. 108, 83, 100]. Besides famous Bible usages (‘By their fruits ye shall know them’, Mt. 7.16, 20), consider a typical citation from the Heidelberg catechism (1563) by Matthias Schneckenburger: Vergleichende Darstellung des lutherischen und reformierten Lehrbegriffes (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1855), I, p. 39.
74. E.g. [XXI, pp. 3, 20, 26, 27, 31, 41, 44, 50, 69, 74, 75, 100].
‘pragmatism’. In the note discussing James in the PESC there is repeated reference to ‘practical-religious conduct’; ‘a specifically practical point of view’; and ethical consequences ‘that are practically so important’ — and this is a theme that pervades the entire text. However, though the realm of ‘practice’ and the ‘practical’ was distinct from that of ‘Ideas’ (Ideen and not merely Gedanken) — it was not simply a copy — there remained a vital connection between the two: if the theology of predestination did not automatically lead to the systematic, ascetic conduct and so to rational capitalist behaviour, still it was the primary causal agent, because it was the starting point from which all else flowed. Authentic pragmatism, by comparison, had a much lower view of the power of ideas. As James put it in the Varieties, ‘to develop a thought’s meaning, we need...only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce’ (p. 444). In other words ‘prior’ intellectual meaning is so relatively unimportant, that we need only measure its substance by reference to the subsequent conduct that ‘derived’ from it. Thus James accepted that there were many religious phenomena which, in terms of their purely intellectual content, were just the same as those he wished to discuss; yet in his view (to say nothing of that of more secularly minded persons) they were ‘too patently silly’ (p. 20) to deserve further attention. One could only discriminate between truly religious experiences and ‘such others as the demon in his malice was able to counterfeit’ by reference to their practical ‘fruits’; not by any attempt to estimate their intellectual value or silliness. But what

75. Hennis thinks it significant that Weber only talks about the practical and active role of ascetic Protestantism in shaping social conduct in the second Part of the PESC (pp. 64-65 [Tribe, pp. 59-60]). However, this (extraordinary!) idea is unsustainable. Conceptually, if Hennis’ view were correct, it would imply that before going to America and meeting James Weber must have assumed that ascetic Protestantism had no impact on conduct. But in this case the PESC would never have been commenced at all. It is true that Part I of the text does not trace the impact of ascetic Protestantism on conduct — that is not its function — but references to key concepts underlying the ‘practical’ argument of Part II — asceticism, rationality, and a specification of the principal ascetic Protestant groups — are all to be found within it. Again, specific emphases on the words ‘practical’ [XX, pp. 35, 44] and ‘task’ [XX, p. 52] and a forceful evocation of ‘the Puritan-capitalist power of action (Tatkraft)’ [XX, p. 14 n. 3] also appear in the 1904 text, and reveal no backwardness of view on this point. In fact Weber had formulated an explicitly practical and even ‘pragmatic’ reading of Christianity at least 20 years before: e.g., to Alfred Weber 25.3.84, to Helene Weber 31.3.86, in Jugendbriefe (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1936), pp. 106-107, 211-12.

76. This definitional statement and the surrounding passage are reproduced unaltered in Lecture II of Pragmatism (1907), in Writings 1902–10, pp. 506-507.
must be stressed here—besides the fact that he himself found the label ‘pragmatism’ problematic—is that he had no interest in examining social and ethical conduct; he only uses the ‘fruit’ as a criterion by which to measure and support the validity of authentic and individual religious experience. The varieties of religion, and not ethics, were his concern. Not only was James ethically inert, he was also (and far more visibly) intellectually inert. Thus his advocacy of the power of the individual’s ‘act’ as that which created the salvation of the world, could evoke the admiration of Mussolini. The connection was by no means inevitable, but it was demonstrable. By his own account the Duce had ‘learnt of James that faith in action…to which Fascism owes a great part of its success’, most probably c. 1908. All this is a world away from Weber. As the reference (pp. 444-45) to the Varieties in the PESC shows, it is precisely James’ crucial definitional passage regarding the anti-intellectual nature of pragmatism just cited, which causes Weber to make his principal complaint: that ‘the content of the ideas of a religion...is of far greater significance than...William James is inclined to concede’.79

Here then is a gulf which the historian must recognize; but yet it did not greatly trouble Weber. As we can see from the PESC and again from the discussion in 1909, ‘pragmatism’ simply confirmed his view of the Anglo-American world which he admired so much, and from his early youth: it was ‘an authentic child of the thought world of the Puritan homeland’ [XXI, p. 25 n. 48]. Why was this?

77. The alternative label to ‘pragmatism’ was Schiller’s ‘humanism’: see, e.g., review of Humanism (1904), in William James, Collected Essays and Reviews (ed. R.B. Perry; London and New York: Longmans, 1920), p. 450. For James’ exiguous thoughts on ethics see, e.g., ‘The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life’ (1891), repr. The Will to Believe (1896): as the title suggests, the philosopher (or academic) can not instruct. James had, of course, plenty of views on ethical and political questions, but they were not delivered as a philosopher and sprung only from empirical consideration of particular cases.

78. Mussolini interview in the London Sunday Times, 11 April, 1926, in Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, p. 575; cf. pp. 575-80 passim, James, Pragmatism, Lecture VIII, in Writings 1902–10, p. 613. In fairness to James, he went on to postulate that individual acts, though seminal and capable of producing qualitative ‘leaps’ forward, must nonetheless be reconciled with the results of previous acts: ‘so Being grows under all sorts of resistances in this world of the many, and, from compromise to compromise…’ (p. 614). This part of his message was plainly less suited to Mussolini’s self-portrait.

We have already described Weber as a very eccentric kind of Kantian [cf. XXI, p. 91 n. 49]—a man who attached ultimate primacy to ideal values—and this eccentricity may be developed a good deal further. For although ultimate primacy did indeed attach to ideal factors and to Kultur—it is a complete misreading of Weber’s repudiation of a ‘one-sided spiritualistic’ interpretation of history [XXI, p. 110] to suppose (as was so agreeable in the third quarter of the twentieth century) that he was a closet materialist ‘after all’—still (as we have seen) these ideas had to be mediated before they could become ‘practice’. The agents of mediation could take many forms. Formal rationality [XX, p. 35] and Wissenschaft⁸⁰ are obvious examples; another quite different one was economic ‘interest’: ‘Interests (material and ideal) and not Ideas are the immediate governors of human conduct. But: the “world pictures” (‘Weltbilder’) which are created by Ideas have very often, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which the dynamic of interests has driven human conduct onwards.’⁸¹ This is a very well-known statement, and yet its implications are hardly recognized, for what it signifies is that the still better known typology of human conduct outlined in c.I §.2 of the final draft of ‘Economy and Society’ (1919–1920) is, if taken in isolation, wholly inadequate as a representation of Weber’s views (though the author could hardly have anticipated the specific form of violent abstraction and simplification performed by modern pedagogy). In this typology Weber presents only a one-dimensional or single-storey typology of individual conduct ranging from the transparently rational to the blindly emotional or traditional; but in his actual analyses, what interested him was the mediation, refinement and modification of initial ‘ideas’ or values’ through a ‘second stage’, the overtly social stage. At this point, a whole series of social or uniform variables take effect—such is the content of the rest of c.I of ‘Economy and Society’—and of these the collective ‘pattern of interests’ is one of the first which it occurs to Weber to mention (§4).⁸² The movement from the individual to the social in this chapter is also identical with that foreshadowed in the PESC from the ‘one-sided’ to the ‘two-sided’ version of history, even if in the PESC the second or social part of the latter was never actually written down.

⁸⁰. See ‘Wissenschaft als Beruf’ [1917-1919], MWG I/17.
⁸¹. GARS, I, p. 252; this is not present in AfSS 41 (1915), p. 15.
⁸². For a succinct summary of this dual, individual-social perspective composed at the same date see the important letter from Weber to Rickert, 26.4.20, Nachlaß Max Weber, 30/9 Bl.1.
So that most eccentric of Kantians, Max Weber, had a strong conception of the role of the radically anti-Kantian category of ‘interest’,\textsuperscript{83} of simple instrumentality and of conduct determined by external ends. This was also the meaning of another term he deployed in the 1890s but which was fading away by 1904-1905: that of rationell or instrumentally rational conduct in terms of economic interest [XXI, p. 103].\textsuperscript{84} (This is not to be confused with more universal category of rational conduct, which commonly required back reference to a fundamental scheme of values or Ideas such as those of ascetic Protestantism.) Once we understand this mindset, we can easily understand his ease and assurance when confronted by the new American usage—‘pragmatism’—since this, by the terms of its definition, fitted so well into an established scheme of instrumental conduct, regardless of its inadequacy as an overall world-view—\textit{Weltbild} or \textit{Weltanschauung}. The obvious reflection of this ease and assurance was that Weber was instantly able to turn the new terminology to his own ends. In the first instance ‘pragmatic’ conduct became simply another word for ‘interested’ conduct, conduct capable of bearing ‘fruit’. A typical example occurs in his ‘anti-critical’ defence of the \textit{PESC} in 1910: ‘So far as “capitalism” itself is concerned, this can only mean a defined “economic system”, i.e. a form of “economic” behaviour towards men and goods which is the “exploitation” of capital, and within which conduct is analysed by us “pragmatically”, i.e. by establishing the “best” or the “inevitable” means relative to the typically given context…’\textsuperscript{85} Again Viennese marginal utility theory (‘the Mengerian theoretical schemata’) is for Weber ‘a pragmatic scheme’ (‘Pragmatik’) because of its foundation in abstractly rational economic self-interest.\textsuperscript{86} Given the generality of usages such as these, neither of which have a specific

\textsuperscript{83} See copious index references q.v. in \textit{MWG} I/3-5; and then \textit{PESC} [XX, p.32; XXI, pp. 3, 9, 18, 41, 83, 96, 105] etc.

\textsuperscript{84} Eg. \textit{MWG} I/3, pp. 297, 898, 903; I/4, pp. 129, 505, 636; I/5, p. 654 etc. Rationell faded as rational came into prominence in 1904–1905: it was obviously too confusing to work with two such terms simultaneously.


\textsuperscript{86} ‘Kritische Studien auf dem Gebiet der kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik I’ [1906], \textit{WL}, p. 227 n. 1. Of course in both this case and the previous one, these usages are not historical: a ‘purely pragmatic idea of history’ (‘Historik’) was ‘an impossibility’ (\textit{WL}, p. 227 cf. p. 224 n. 1), because any form of pragmatic (or instrumental) conduct necessarily depended on prior, historically specific assumptions in \textit{Kultur} and values (e.g. that economic gain was good in itself). Cf. ‘Antikritisches’, \textit{AfSS} 30 (1910), p. 198 n. 30 \textit{ad fin}.

link to America, it will be apparent that any distinctively American doctrine of ‘pragmatism’ had made no impact on Weber at all. Indeed ‘pragmatism’ is the one word he never utilizes amidst a clutch of related terms. Later on he would move still further away from James and Peirce. Instead of simply equating ‘pragmatic’ conduct with self-interest, he now began to give it a distinctive meaning, deriving from the classical Greek pragma—here falling back on the humanistic conditioning received at the Gymnasium. Pragma is broadly the equivalent of the Latin res, literally the ‘thing’ or ‘concern’, analogous to the Latin respublica. It is then closely associated with politics, and such is the source of the frequent, later Weberian references to ‘the pragma of power’, ‘the pragma of force (‘Gewaltsamkeit’),’ 87 or to the uniquely Occidental ‘pragma of Thucydides’ 88—the analyst of instrumental power politics.

There could hardly be a more complete case of the internalization and appropriation of an external label, though it was a trick Weber performed on innumerable occasions. Yet this by no means completes our understanding of Weber’s relations with Jamesian pragmatism since (as noted) the latter was not seen simply as an individual product but as in some sense representative of Puritan America and its historical tradition. In the PESC Weber merely asserts this fact without bothering to explain it. However, his line of reasoning is obvious: measured by its fruits, ‘the Puritan scheme of “pragmatic” interpretation of success in one’s calling was entirely consistent with a ‘purely utilitarian’ understanding of human conduct [XXI, p. 83 cf. p. 14 n. 21]. Now the central evolutionary pattern of English history, so far as Weber was concerned, lay in the turn from ascetic Protestantism in the seventeenth century to its ‘utilitarian heir’ in the eighteenth century as ‘the religious root’ of the former ‘slowly died out’ [XXI, p. 104].89 (By comparison industrialization and economic history are, if not quite irrelevant, mere epiphenomena.) Read thus, ‘pragmatism’, with its denial that it was necessary to seek into the meaning of religious ideas, was no more than a symptom of the descent of ascetic Protestantism into ‘this-worldly’ utilitarianism. Here was the sense in which James was

87. E.g. ‘Zwischenbetrachtung’, AfSS 41 (1915), p. 403. English translation commonly renders Gewaltsamkeit as ‘violence’, but this clouds our understanding: it focuses attention on a particular, deviant manner in which power may be exercised and moves away from the fact of power or force in itself which, as one half of a fundamental contrast with the realm of value, is the thing that interests Weber.

88. Vorbemerkung [1920], GARS I, p. 2.

89. The point is continually repeated: [XXI, p. 75 n. 3, pp. 76 n. 6, 106, 109].
‘an authentic child…of the Puritan homeland’. Consonant with this Weber could depict the United States as the land where, at one and the same time, capitalism had been given its freest rein, yet capitalist ‘acquisitive striving’ was ‘stripped of its metaphysical meaning’ [XXI, pp. 108-109]. So Jamesian pragmatism is a form of Anglophone utilitarianism—and indeed this is not without a grain of truth, as is evident from James’ great respect for J.S. Mill, or his statement in Pragmatism that

> Being nothing essentially new, it harmonizes with many ancient philosophical tendencies. It agrees with nominalism for instance, in always appealing to particulars; with utilitarianism in emphasizing practical aspects; with positivism in its disdain for verbal solutions, useless questions, and metaphysical abstractions.\(^{90}\)

But the fact remains that here too Weber’s practice is entirely one of assimilation to his own intellectual scheme; there is no substantive impact from without.

4. Conclusions

How, then, to place Weber’s distance from James in a wider perspective? So far as Weber himself was concerned the obvious contrast, despite his own pronounced and deeply felt Anglophilia, was that between Anglo-American *Kultur* on the one hand and that of the Western European Continent on the other. Hence an emphasis on the roots of pragmatism in ‘the quite distinct characteristics of the physical modes of thought’—in other words, empiricism—‘which have long been native in England and America…in contrast to France and, until Mach, Germany’.\(^{91}\) In this respect he wrote as a typical German liberal. Troeltsch too picked up—he could hardly fail to do so—on James’ well publicized ‘root…in the British philosophy of strict empiricism’, and this was simply the starting point for a whole series of further oppositions: above all to the whole framework of logical and conceptual structures deriving from the original ‘demand of reason’.\(^{92}\) Hence James’ (perceived and actual) opposition to rational religion; to the logi-


\(^{92}\) Troeltsch, ‘Empiricism and Platonism in the Philosophy of Religion. To the Memory of William James’, *Harvard Theological Review* V (1912) respectively, pp. 409, 403. The position adopted here is essentially the same as that adopted in the lecture given at St Louis in 1904, but the occasion of the obituary produces a more detached and commanding perspective.
cal and conceptual ‘abstractions’ of *Wissenschaft*; and to the ‘idea of a universal cosmic law governing nature’ — the last of which led directly to the political idea of ‘natural laws’, a subject in which both Weber and Troeltsch were keenly interested. For his part James was equally well aware of the intellectual distance between Germany and America at this date: the discourses of ‘reason’ and ‘science’ were of course common property throughout Western Europe, but that of ‘academic science’ or *Wissenschaft* undoubtedly reached its acme in the German university system. So when the *Varieties* was translated into German in 1907, he commented rather gloomily to his Oxonian friend and fellow pragmatist F.C.S. Schiller that he ‘should hope for no intelligent readers for either of us in Germany. The German mind is immunized by all its previous toxins against our health microbe’, pragmatism.

However, though this is a central truth, it will not quite suffice. The *telos* of Weber’s interest in religion and psychology was always a public one — the need to support, develop or re-work classical liberal structures in law, religion and ‘science’ — and here is the point of maximal contrast either side of the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean. Thus James’ religion and psychology were construed in a radically private manner — ‘the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude’ (pp. 30-31) — and this was just as much an authentic sign of Anglo-American *laisser faire* as any ‘Manchesterism’. Hence his preference for the exceptional (of all kinds) or his ideal of a few chosen spirits living on a mountain-top where, ‘whenever we got tired of philosophizing, [we could] calm our minds by taking refuge in the scenery’. But though this was a fundamental aspect of the differences between the two men, it makes the evident point that by their nature such subjects could also be treated as individual, metaphysical or material realms, without any necessary social implication — even in Europe. When to this is added James’ own extensive travels in Europe and the avowedly eclectic foundations of his ‘pluralistic universe’, it is easy to see how pragmatism could claim a wide range

93. Troeltsch, ‘Empiricism and Platonism in the Philosophy of Religion. To the Memory of William James’, pp. 418, 404, 405 respectively.
94. *PESC* [XX, pp. 41 n. 1, 43 n. 2, 48 n. 3; XXI, pp. 17, 23, 67 nn. 134, 90].
96. To Henri Bergson 4.10.08, *Correspondence of William James* (ed. Skrupselis and Berkeley).
97. Besides the sub-title of *Pragmatism — A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* — see above, n. 90.
of European contacts and sympathizers: ‘Mach in Austria...the somewhat more reluctant Poincaré in France...Simmel in Berlin...Bergson, and more particularly his disciples Wilbois, Le Roy, and others in France...Ostwald in Leipzig with his Energetics...’98 And of course other names could and should be added, notably Gustav Fechner—like Ostwald, an intellectual provocation to Weber—Théodore Flournoy and Giovanni Papini.99 Conversely, it should be noted that Weber’s attempt in 1909 to demonstrate the power of cultural tradition in regard to natural scientific empiricism—by upholding this as primarily Anglo-American—was very weak as regards the modern day, even on his own presentation. (His remarks on this subject in the PESC as regards the seventeenth century are still more confused and vulnerable, but for different reasons: [XXI, p. 53 n. 108].) Except for James and Clerk Maxwell, every proponent of sensationalist empiricism that Weber cites is a European (Ostwald, Kirchhoff, Mach, Duhem), and even the currency of Clerk Maxwell in this debate was primarily due to the development of his ideas by the German, Heinrich Hertz.100

We might reasonably conclude, then, that there was both a nationality and an internationality of Kultur. However, even this cannot be quite our last word. Weber’s sceptical meditation on the ‘limits’ to this internationality in his review of Adolf Weber remains an entirely justified reaction, if not to the breadth, then to the depth of the cosmopolitan claims made for pragmatism; in particular to James’ much neglected (and thoroughly American) claims as a showman, but with a considerable sense of inferiority relative to Europe. So in his last decade he consistently saw himself as promoting a new ‘movement’, calling on his European friends to ‘join in the great strategic combination’; ‘assisting at the éclosion of a great new mental epoch, life, religion, and philosophy in one’, and making full use of ‘the interna-

98. Review of Schiller’s Humanism [1904], in William James, Collected Essays and Reviews, pp. 449-50; cf. the similar list in Pragmatism, Lecture II, Writings 1902–10, p. 511. As regards Simmel, James is thinking specifically of the essay ‘Über eine Beziehung der Selektionslehre zur Erkenntnistheorie’ (1895): R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, p. 470 and n. 3.


100. Die Prinzipien der Mechanik in neuem Zusammenhange dargestellt (Leipzig: Geest & Portig, 1894).
tional right of way’ to do so. But this was of course a utopian mirage. Hence two further conclusions: that though there was an international discourse of natural science, this of itself can tell us nothing of its social and cultural impact. (Like Weber, we must leave it to the specialist to establish the depth of its penetration.) Secondly, that outside America international pragmatism was no more than skin deep; a temporary coalition of James’ friends and contacts, which would pass away with him. In this sense the nationality of Kultur remained powerful, and Weber’s belief in it well-founded.

Appendix

(1) Weber on James in the PESC (1905)

Calvinist piety is an example of the relationship between the logically and psychologically transmitted consequences of specific religious ideas (‘Gedanken’) for practical-religious conduct. Logically fatalism would be the naturally deducible consequence of predestination, but the psychological effect was precisely the reverse because of the insertion of the idea of ‘proof’ (‘Bewährung’). This is already neatly set out by Hoornbeck, in the language of his day (Theol. pract. i.159): the elect are inaccessible to fatalism just because of their election; it is by their very repulsion of these fatalistic consequences that they prove themselves, ‘quos ipsa electio sollicitos reddit et diligentes officiorum’. [Election itself is a reward for those who are anxious and diligent in their actions.] But on the other hand the idea content (‘Gedankengehalt’) of a religion—as Calvinism itself shows—is of far greater significance than, for example, William James’ is inclined to concede (The Varieties of Religious Experience, 1902, pp. 444-45). It is precisely the significance of the rational component in religious metaphysics which is displayed in classical fashion through the tremendous impact on life exercised by the thought structure of the Reformed concept of God in particular. If the God of the Puritans has been at work in history like hardly any Other, before or since, he has been enabled to do so by those attributes with which the power of thought has equipped him. Incidentally, James ‘pragmatic’ evaluation of the significance of religious ideas according to the measure of their proof in life is itself an authentic child of the thought world of the Puritan homeland of this

101. Respectively James to Papini 27.4.06; to Flournoy 26.3.07; to Schiller 7.4.06, 19.4.07 (out of innumerable examples): Correspondence of William James.

102. The following translations are my own.
outstanding scholar. Inner religious experience (‘Erlebnis’) as such is self-evidently irrational, like any inner experience. In its highest, mystical form it really is the experience κατ’ εξοχήν (‘par excellence’) and, as James has very finely argued [p. 380], is distinguished by its absolute incommunicability: it has a specific character and appears as a form of cognition [of the divine], but it is not capable of being adequately reproduced by means of our linguistic and conceptual apparatus. And it is also true to say that every religious experience loses something of its content as soon as one attempts to formulate it rationally, and still more so, the more conceptual the formulation. Herein lies the basis of the tragic conflicts afflicting all rational theology, as the baptising sects knew even in the 17th century. But this irrationality—which, by the by, is in no way confined to religious ‘experience’ alone, but pertains to any such (in differing senses and in varying degrees)—does not exclude the fact that, from a specifically practical point of view, it is of the utmost importance what type of thought system it is which, so to speak, appropriates for itself what has been directly religiously ‘experienced’, and guides it onto its own tracks; for it is along these lines that most of those differences in ethical consequences that are practically so important are arranged, such as exist between the various religions of the earth [XXI, p. 25 n. 48].

(2) Max Weber’s review of Adolf Weber, Die Aufgaben der Volkswirtschaftslehre als Wissenschaft (1909), conclusion:

Finally the author makes his protest—especially valuable coming from a teacher at a Handelshochschule—against the valuation of Wissenschaft solely according to the criterion: savoir pour pouvoir, such as occasionally occurs with Ostwald and more generally amongst chemists and technologists, a protest which leads to a somewhat distorted characterization of so-called ‘pragmatism’ in what are however only short observations (pp. 52-53).† The confusion attaching to the root qualities of this anti-philosophical ‘philosophy’ has led in fact to the repeated employment of the concept of ‘cash value’ as a measurement of its truth content, and in a purely practical-utilitarian sense. Yet in W. James the concept has not only this minimum sense, but at least one other also: value for the ‘simplest description’ (in Kirchhoff’s sense) of empirical facts,104 whose cognitive content is worthy of our (scien-

103. Adolf Weber (1876–1963) was Professor of Staatswissenschaften at Cologne.
104. Gustav Robert Kirchhoff (1824–87), was a physicist of the same generation as Helmholtz—a better known object of Weber’s attention—and like Helmholtz a Profes-
tific) interest, and in practice this value is of quite perceptible significance due to the fact that the rejection of the postulate of a unitary world picture (‘Weltbild’) makes space free for his religious and mystically oriented premisses. It is surely no accident that the chief seat of these views is America and—at the very least—England as well, but for quite other reasons than those which the author seems to suppose. Since the days of nominalism and Bacon the doctrine of the plurality of truth has always had one of its chief seats in England and was pressed into service there at alternate times either on behalf of the freedom of empirical, scientific research as against dogmatic constraint, or to secure religious needs against the forward march of natural science. Earlier it sufficed for this purpose, when religious truth, seen as the absolute irrational, was placed alongside empirical Wissenschaft but wholly separate from it, and was thus held at a distance from any complication and from all conflicts with the latter. Today this is no longer sufficient, and the absolute irrationality of all cognitive meaning—not simply the conception of the ‘world’ as an ‘object’ (for example)—must be added on, so as to create the necessary space for the interests of religion. Of course, this theme which takes effect in James in this way is not universally accepted today. On the contrary, alongside other roots ‘pragmatism’ normally finds what is assuredly a very strong foundation in the quite distinct characteristics of the physical modes of thought which have long been native in England and America (in contrast to France and, until Mach, Germany), and which stand out quite characteristically in [Clerk] Maxwell too: for example, in the employment of methods of [experimental] demonstration which cannot be unified with each other rationally—they are illustrative and appeal to sense perception—but which could never raise the claim that they should represent the ‘inner being (‘Sein’)’ of the process. But even this mode of proceeding, which Duhem105 for example has elegantly portrayed in contrast to the autochthonous continental version, and which is particularly close to the chain of ideas in the pragmatic ‘economy of thought’,106 leads back

105. Pierre Maurice Duhem (1861–1916), French Catholic physicist and founder of “energetics” (or general thermodynamics) in France. The textual reference is to La Théorie physique, son objet et structure (Paris: M. Rivière, 1906).

106. A phrase associated with Ernst Mach (1838–1916) and first enunciated in Die Geschichte und die Wurzel des Satzes von der Erhaltung der Arbeit (1872). Given that
past the origins of modern natural science to its roots; but still this is not the place to pursue this theme further. The interesting thing in such an inquiry, which only a specialist could carry out, would be in essence to know that the often emphasised ‘internationality’ of ‘Kultur’ has its limits even in the sphere [p. 620] of intellectual achievement (explicable essentially in terms of the historical traditions of Kultur, but at the same time perhaps influenced in its direction by [ethnic] ‘dispositions’ or geographical conditions. — The fact that ‘pragmatism’ is historically ‘explicable’ to us does not of course improve its philosophical value, and on this principal point I agree with the author. [AfSS 29 (1909), pp. 619-20]

† (3) Adolf Weber on William James
There are ‘thoroughly modern’ people who say of the ‘truth’ — something which the present author would like to make the sole guiding star of social-economic science — that that too is only a ‘word’. A recent philosophical trend which, characteristically, has its chief seat in the United States, only allows that the truth has validity if it has a ‘cash-value’: ‘Everything is true which, in the realm of intellectual conviction, proves itself as good on definite and given grounds.’107 (William James) The principle of truth is thus that of instrumentality: Savoir pour prévoir, pour pouvoir. This doctrine of the ‘pragmatists’ ought by its consequences to bring with it the general collapse of Wissenschaft; at any rate it ought to drag it down from the commanding height which it has occupied until now in the development of Kultur.

scientific thought was inevitably outstripped by the infinity of phenomena it confronted, its utility lay in the ability to provide as economical a description of those phenomena as possible. The principal application of this idea lay in its emphasis on a ‘descriptive’ as opposed to an ‘explanatory’ science; that is, on the need to confine oneself to strict empiricism and to avoid metaphysical, absolutist assumptions of the kind built into Newtonian physics (for example) — though (as James saw) these assumptions also pervaded the wider Continental European discourse of ‘reason’, a discourse deeply implicated in the scientific movement of the seventeenth century.

107. ‘Cash-value’ occurs in Pragmatism, Lectures II, VI: see Writings 1902–10, pp. 509, 573; the quotation is in Lecture II (Writings 1902–10, p. 520). However, Adolf Weber’s translation is rather different from what James actually wrote, which occurs in a section of the text relating to religious truth rather than to truth in general. (Indeed given a plethora of usable quotations of this kind, especially in Lecture VI on ‘Pragmatism’s Conception of the Truth’, the choice is a strange one.) For this reason I have translated the translation, which removes all reference to religion. Compare James’ text: ‘The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons’.

The hasty pursuit of success would thrust aside the man who seeks knowledge for its own sake, as a useless time-waster. But I think that there is still enough left of German idealism and German thought-power at least, so that German researchers will never fall into the temptation of viewing truth simply as an instrument for the purposes of action. For us the truth remains something independent and absolute [Die Aufgaben der Volkswirtschaftslehre als Wissenschaft (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1909), pp. 52-53].