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Religion as a Model of and Model for the Society

“I guide you in the way of wisdom¹” - Theoretical Points of Departure

It is a common wisdom that if one wants to understand the contemporary world (s)he must be familiar with the history. The modern world - as well as other human societies - are built on the basis of its past. When we ponder how past times influence in our life, the most obvious examples are our frames of time. We still divide our hours and minutes into 60 smaller units - like ancient Sumerians 5000 years ago. Our calendar is basically the same (only with two modifications by Julius Caesar and pope Gregorian) that ancient Egyptians used since the dawn of the written history.

Similar continuity can be seen in social values and practices as well. In the field of welfare, the basic responsibility for welfare services for the last 5000 years has been on the family/kin and religious institutions. In the *Code of Hammurabi* (§32), we can even find the principle of subsidiarity that is the basis of the Central European welfare model. In ideological level, the western equality doctrine is fundamentally based on the Hebrew creation story where a human was created as an image of God - emphasising that both slave and king are ontologically equal in front of God and His law.

A second theoretical point of departure is that my work falls in the broad frame of the interactionist-constructivist tradition. This means that there are no objective facts outside human culture but all interpretations of the 'reality' are social constructions. Theoretically, this means that also scientific works are constructions based on the concepts and paradigms in each discipline. These, in turn, depend on the values in the society where academic institutions locate. For this work it has three important consequences. Accepting that academic work is culturally bound, this work will be somewhat a picture of my thought. Scholars with different world views, different theoretical bases or different interests will most probably disagree with me in many points. I also see previous studies as constructions based on philosophical, religious and theoretical preferences. These preferences often lead the studies to the extent that some important aspects remain hidden. This means that, although theory is important tool of research, the limitations of the tool must be acknowledged and expressed.

¹ Prov 4:11.

My third theoretical starting point is the “classical” research of Nordic welfare state. In this discussion, Erik Allardt’s comparative studies of Nordic welfare states have been a hallmark of research². He has argued that

indicators of welfare are not merely some kind of variables. They are explicitly value-oriented, and as such concerned with the good and bad life. Hence indicators of welfare may also be labelled value-dimensions or welfare values.³

Allardt’s emphasis is on values and this means that measuring welfare differs from culture to culture since people value different things. Based on Brian Barry’s⁴ distinction, he argues that there are basically two approaches to welfare: one based on wants of the people and another based on ideals of the culture⁵. On one hand, “especially in Anglo-Saxon social sciences welfare and related issues have been defined by starting with the values, wants and opinions⁶.” This, according to him, arises from utilitarian heritage. Contrary to this, especially Swedish studies have been based on ‘objective’ research of resources that individuals can master and control⁷. Behind these different approaches one can find different emphases of these societies: individualism in Anglo-Saxon countries and emphasis on state leadership in Sweden.

The major problem of this project is that although it identifies values as basic source of the welfare decisions, it did not identify those deep values that lay behind the Nordic welfare thinking. This is understandable while one remembers how total was the dismissal of religion in social sciences in the 1970’s and 1980’s⁸ - in spite of the emphasis that the classics of anthropology and sociology paid on religion and its impact on society. Especially Max Weber⁹ and Talcott Parsons¹⁰ have argued for the significance of ideas in human action. Weber even had as a grand project to interpret the different economics of the cultures with their dominant religions¹¹. Thus, in order to understand the values of welfare, one has to look at the deep values that lie behind them. In most societies these are imbedded in the social ethics of the dominant religion.

My fourth theoretical emphasis is that, like theories, ideologies and religious doctrines are seen in this study as results of human interaction. They are common interpretations of the phenomena

² Allardt 1976a, 9. In English, see, for example, Allardt (1972; 1973; 1975; 1976b; 1989).

³ Allardt 1976a, 227.

⁴ Barry 1965, 35-52.

⁵ Allardt 1976a, 19.

⁶ Allardt 1976a, 18.

⁷ Allardt 1989, 2f.

⁸ Christian Smith (1996, 2ff.) gives a good list of the reasons why sociologists dismissed the study of religious movements and it is valid in other fields of sociology as well. Joel Robbins (2007), in turn, discusses the neglect of Christianity in anthropology.

⁹ Weber 1970, 280.

¹⁰ Parsons 1969, 558-563.

¹¹ Weber 1920-1

that societies have faced and they are expressed in words and concepts that have been meaningful to them. This does not mean to make any claim on the existence or non-existence of the phenomena they are describing.

Max Weber¹² and Talcott Parsons¹³ have argued for the significance of ideas in human action. However, in many cases religion studies on philanthropic action trace from, what Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark call "consequential aspect of religion"¹⁴ (or ideology) and what Ninian Smart calls "practical dimension" (attached with ethical and legal dimension)¹⁵. They mostly take the doctrine as given and trace the action from it. For certain extent this is a valid approach. However it is only half of the truth. Clifford Geertz presented in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* that religions are both models *of* the society and models *for* the society¹⁶. What Geertz says on the anthropology of religion is valid in the related disciplines (sociology of religion, theology) as well: "My dissatisfaction with much of contemporary social anthropological work in religion is not that it concerns itself with the second stage, but that it neglects the first, and in so doing takes for granted what most needs to be elucidated¹⁷." The other extreme is to concentrate on the first and to reduce religion to economic, political or cultural patterns. The importance of Geertz is that he emphasises the need of both. In his *Religion as a Cultural System* from 1966, Geertz defined religion as:

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.¹⁸

Thus, what Geertz is meaning with this definition is that a religion both interprets the reality and creates moods and motivations that influence people's actions¹⁹. One might add that religion also

¹² Weber 1970,280.

¹³ Parsons 1969,558-563.

¹⁴ Glock & Stark 1965.

¹⁵ Smart 1983; 1989.

¹⁶ Geertz 1973, 93, 123.

¹⁷ Geertz 1973, 125.

¹⁸ Reprinted in Geertz 1973, 90.

¹⁹ Geertz' theses are similar to those presented in the interactionist string of collective behavior literature. In this tradition, Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian developed their thesis of 'emerging norm' to explain how new norms occur. They studied how people create legitimate action plans. They state that in new situations new norms are negotiated on the basis of old values that are modified to give an answer to a new problem. In the same way, social constructivists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1972, 55-58, 113-122) have argued about how a routinised behaviour or thinking is stored in the symbolic universe. When needed, it will be reviewed, reprocessed and restored. For them, religion is one of these symbolic universes. In cognitive psychology, Ulric Neisser (1976, 110-117) has also presented a similar theory of routinisation of thinking. He calls these schemata. According to him, we have different cognitive maps on our environment that direct our observation and action. Then we try to fit this mental map to our present environment. If the reality does not fit to our mental map, we modify it and it becomes a new cognitive map. What is common to all these theories is that there is some kind of cycle of existing knowledge, map or frame that direct peoples' thinking. When this map does not fit into the present reality, it will be modified as a combination of previous knowledge and new information. This process, then, gives new model that will be routinised and directing

provides values²⁰ and models for decisions and actions. Interpretation of reality is often presented in some form of cosmogony (how the world has emerged), cosmology (how the world functions) and anthropology (what is the role of man in the world). Some religions (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam) add also eschatology (how the world ends). Rather often these aspects of religious teaching aim to interpret questions that are fundamental to philanthropy and welfare: "why there is suffering in the world?" and "how should people cope with that suffering?" The last aspect is attached to the ethics of religions.

“Do not forsake my teaching²¹” – Model for studying welfare

The following research model, graphically expressed in the figure 1, is based on the Geertzian ideas of 'model of' and 'model for' and his definition of religion as a system of symbols that interpret the world and establish motivations and values. However, it is only this basic idea that I take from Geertz. Into this general idea, I add elements from other theories. In the figure, there is graphically presented how the elements of context are processed in religion in order to give out major elements of welfare (or charity or philanthropic) activity.

There are basically three parts in this model: context, religion and welfare activities. This means that, first, I investigate what is the context that religion explains. This

will be done with the help of the concept of opportunity structures – historical, economic, cultural and political.

Second, I study what is, in Berger and Luckmann's terms, the symbolic universe of religion, where cultures store their interpretations of the reality as well as values. Finally, as cases, I look at four aspects of welfare, justice (or righteousness), social care, medical care and education.

At this point, it must be emphasised that elements in this model are only analytical distinctions in Weberian sense. In reality, different dimensions blur together – especially when applying the model

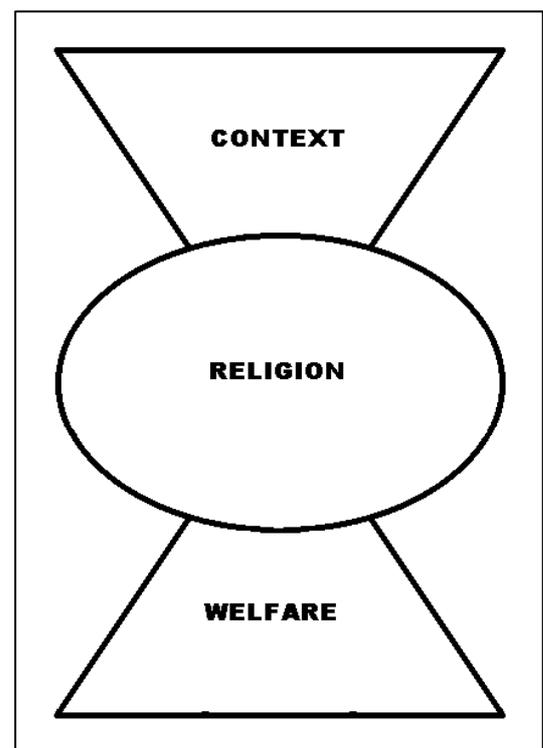


Figure 1: Model for studying welfare

peoples' orientation. The basic difference between Neisser and the others is that Neisser's schemata, as the property of individuals, are supposedly to change in shorter intervals than, for example, Turner and Killian's 'norms' or Geertz' 'symbols'.

²⁰ World ethic scholar Reijo E. Heinonen (1997) has called religion as 'value-memory of culture.'

to ancient societies: in ancient Egypt, the Pharaoh was god, head of the state and major economic actor. Moreover the dynamics is not only one way from context to religion to welfare, as I present in the model, but religion and welfare activities modify the context as well.

“Enjoy life... that God has given you under the sun²²” – Focusing on the Context

Context in the upper part of the 'hour glass' is the environment that religion is supposed to explain. In his theories, Geertz does not give any theoretical tools how to frame this environment. Therefore, I look the context from four different perspectives, history, culture (in the meaning of way of life), economy (in Polanyian substantive sense²³) and politics. These are not separate entities but different “windows to the same room.” While analysing the context from these perspectives, I utilise the concept of opportunity structures²⁴ in the interpretation of the context. There are historical, cultural²⁵, economic²⁶ and political²⁷ opportunity structures²⁸ that frame the possibilities of actors in any society.

²¹ Prov. 4:2.

²² Eccl 9:9.

²³ For Karl Polanyi (1977, 20), “substantive meaning [of economy] stems, in brief, from man’s patent dependence for his livelihood upon nature and his fellows. He survives by virtue of an institutionalised interaction between himself and his natural surroundings.”

²⁴ The concept of opportunity structures is widely used in social movement studies. Although the concept was developed to interpret the context of social movements, it can be applied in the contexts of other collective action as well.

²⁵ Cultural opportunity structures refer to cases, which do not focus on question of politics and economic resources, but the overall influence of certain cultures. Karl-Werner Brand links opportunity structure approach to neo-institutional theory (see, e.g., Meyer & Rowan 1977, DiMaggio & Powell 1983, Tolbert & Zucker 1997) and discourse theory. By discourse theory Brand means a combination of Ann Swidler’s (1986; 1995) idea of ‘culture as a tool kit’, Maarten A. Hajer’s (1995) ‘story lines’ and ‘discourse coalitions’, William Gamson’s (1975) ‘issue packages’, David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford’s (1992) ‘framing strategies’ and Volker Bornhvier’s (1988) ‘societal models’. Brand 1994, 3f. Brand argues that, alongside political and economical struggles, social movements are depended on the *Zeitgeist* of their time (1990a; 1990b, 2.). By *Zeitgeist*, ‘social mood’ or ‘cultural climate’ he means “the specific configuration of world-views, thoughts and emotions, fears and hopes, beliefs and utopias, feelings of crisis or security, of pessimism or optimism, which prevail in this period. This *Zeitgeist* creates a specific sensitivity for problems; it narrows or broadens the horizon of what seems socially and politically feasible; it directs patterns of political behavior and life-styles; it channels psycho-social energies outward into the public or inward into the private sphere.(Brand 1990a, 28)”

Thus, cultural opportunity structures refer to the overall *Zeitgeist* of a certain culture. However, Brand (1994, 5f.) also points out that “modern western societies have differentiated a whole host of institutional subsystems... in which development largely follows the logic of its own inherent organizational rationality.” Thus, it is not only the general *Zeitgeist* of a culture but also the *Zeitgeist* of special sub-cultures and their interaction that creates cultural opportunity structures.

²⁶ Economic opportunity structures refer to the material basis of the society. In social movement research, they have been emphasised in resource mobilization approach. John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (1977, 1224ff.) state that the more resources there are in a society the more social movements there are. This is because social movement organisations (SMO) compete for that surplus that people put towards entertainment, organised religion, voluntary associations and politics. Where income goes for basic needs, a surplus does not exist and there are fewer social movements. Especially Mayer N. Zald (1991, 350) has defended this thesis by pointing out that the nuclear accident in Chernobyl generated more social movement mobilisation in Stockholm than in Kiev or Warsaw. McCarthy and

Opportunity structures are not determinants of the action in the sense that from A follows B but frames that give or limit the available possibilities. It was, for example, an economic fact that Mesopotamia did not have minerals in its soil. On the other hand, it had plenty of clay, fertile soil, lots of fish and sunshine. Thus, economically, Mesopotamians had to act according to these pros and cons. Opportunity structures could be compared, for example to chess: there are certain rules that define how the different characters could move and threaten the opposite men. These rules are determinants but they leave the final choice of move to the player.

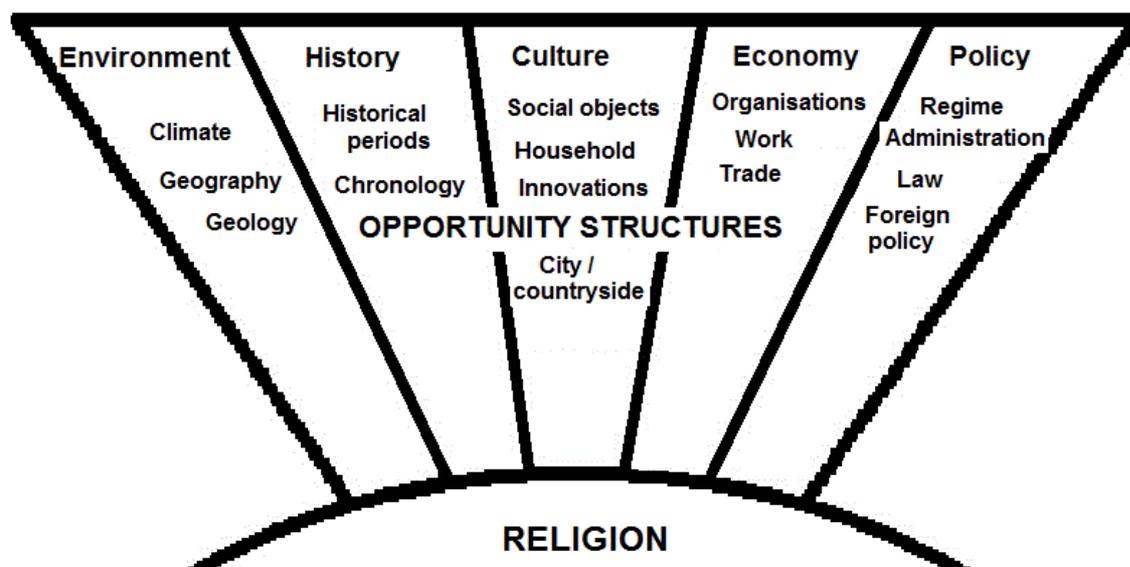


Figure 2: Context

From welfare and philanthropy perspective opportunity structures contain the sub-elements presented in the following list:

Zald's theses are much in the same line as Hannan and Freeman's (1977; 1989) ecological theory of organisations, which uses biological metaphors of struggle for food and life-space in the case of organisations. Certain environments can only feed a certain amount of organisations. This seems to be one modulation of Maslow's classical hierarchy of needs. Applied to philanthropy, their theses mean that the more wealth there exists in society, the more philanthropic activity there exists. Contrary to this theory, Karl Polanyi (1944, 46) has argued that in tribal society, "the community keeps all its members from starving unless it is itself borne down by catastrophe, in which case interests are again threatened collectively, not individually."

²⁷ The concept of political opportunity structure was implicitly presented by Michael Lipsky (1968) in 1960's and developed by Charles Tilly (1978), Doug McAdam (1982), Sidney Tarrow (1983) and Herbert Kitschelt (1986). They have, according to Sidney Tarrow (1988, 429), the following variables: "the degree of openness or of closure of the polity; the stability or instability of political alignments; the presence or absence of allies and support groups; divisions within the elite or its tolerance for protest; and the policy-making capacity of the government." In short, political opportunity structures refer to the web of political actors, authorities, legislative systems, trends and preferences within which the given actor exists.

²⁸ I have elsewhere argued that we could also speak about religious opportunity structures (Muukkonen 2002, 46-53). Since I take religion as a separate analytical unit, I do not duplicate it here. However, for example, Jewish religion could be studied apart from its religious context between Babylonian, Egyptian and Hellenistic pantheons.

ENVIRONMENT is the starting point in understanding any opportunity structures of any location. Karl Polanyi expressed this with his concept of substantial economy: it means the way how human beings utilise their physical environment and its natural resources. In this sense, it is crucial which kinds of geographical and geological environments surround people and in which kinds of climates they have to face: bananas just don't grow in Finland but there are huge forests.

Surrounding determines much of the politics as well. In foreign policy, the natural boundaries are important and, for example, Britain has always been an island separated from the rest of Europe. Travel routes also dictate possibilities to control some area. Throughout the history, large troops have been transported quicker through rivers than by marching them through rocky mountains. Deserts and marshlands, on the other hand, have always been difficult to control by any government.

Environment modifies also the culture. Isolation from - or interaction with - other communities give different cultural opportunities - as well as living by the seaside or in the forest. A good example of the influence of environment to culture is the idea of *Maa'at* in Ancient Egypt. The basic idea is the duality between life and death or battle between Horus and Seth. The fertile strip on both sides of the Nile is rather narrow and it is constantly threatened by the desert.

HISTORY frame the opportunities in certain historical moments. Different events and episodes often change the tracts of history, as it can be said. Europe would be probably quite different if the outcome of the battles of Marathon and Salamis would have been different. Likewise, both Asia and Europe would have been different if Alexander of Macedonia would have not died in his young age. In economics there has been, since 1980's, interest in path dependency theory²⁹ in order to explain why some less advanced systems (like qwerty-keyboard and VHS-cassette) won the competition with their more advanced competitors. The key thesis is that in some point the innovation "locks n" and after that it is cheaper to continue using it than invest in new and possible better. In the same way, ideas and conventions lock in – or routinise as Berger & Luckmann state it. In history, there has been a tendency to lock-in to certain solutions irrespective whether it is the best solution or not. On the other hand, there are long "latent" periods when it seems that nothing is changing or that there is a slow progressive ripening of issues that then burst in some moment. Then, there is needed a remarkable critical period in order to break these routines.

According to theories on collapse of civilisations³⁰, ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt were examples of this kind of lock-in or routinised societies. Israel and Greece, on the other hand, were situated in

²⁹ On the review of this and other "continuity theories", see Muukkonen 2005.

³⁰ See, e.g., Yoffee 1988.

the periphery of these cultural centres and for them the old routines were not so important and thus – in these dynamic societies these old routines were broken.

According to George L. Cowgill, there must, however, be made a distinction between a collapse of civilisation and collapse of a state. Europe has experienced both. Through its history, there have been numerous times when states have collapsed but its civilisation has been the glue that has kept it together.³¹

History is also cumulative. Innovations tend to change the culture and once the genie is out of the bottle, it is hard to put there back. Fire, plough, writing, metals, printing, engine, etc. have all changed the world. Empires have risen and fell but influenced their world each in their own way. Some moments have, of course been more important than others but one never knows which event will change the world history. Pilate didn't know that when he executed the odd preacher from Galilee.

CULTURE defines human's way of life more internalised than previous opportunity structures. frame the way of life of people in different societies. Geertz (1973, 89) defines culture as follows:

...it denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.³²

Social movement scholar Karl-Werner Brand, in turn, argues that, alongside political and economical struggles, social movements are depended on the *Zeitgeist* of their time³³. By *Zeitgeist*, 'social mood' or 'cultural climate' he means

the specific configuration of world-views, thoughts and emotions, fears and hopes, beliefs and utopias, feelings of crisis or security, of pessimism or optimism, which prevail in this period. This *Zeitgeist* creates a specific sensitivity for problems; it narrows or broadens the horizon of what seems socially and politically feasible; it directs patterns of political behavior and life-styles; it channels psycho-social energies outward into the public or inward into the private sphere.³⁴

Thus, cultural opportunity structures refer to the overall *Zeitgeist* of a certain culture. However, Brand also points out that "modern western societies have differentiated a whole host of institutional subsystems... in which development largely follows the logic of its own inherent organizational rationality³⁵." Thus, it is not only the general *Zeitgeist* of a culture but also the *Zeitgeist* of special sub-cultures and their interaction that creates cultural opportunity structures.

Geertz points much more on the symbolic aspect of culture than Brand, who also includes moods and other nonsymbolic aspects to culture. However, for both, culture is a way of thinking and

³¹ Cowgill, 1988, 256.

³² Geertz 1973, 89.

³³ Brand 1990a; 1990b, 2.

³⁴ Brand 1990a, 28.

acting. Here I understand “culture” more in anthropological sense as major characteristics of each civilization³⁶ than in the sociological meaning of high culture (arts, literature and music)³⁷.

Geertz defines symbol shortly: “...the conception if the symbol’s ‘meaning’.”³⁸ However, from his example, it is clear that he does not make distinction between sign and symbol. I understand symbol wider than that. It is a sign that refers to the totality of the thing that it represents while sign and its connotations refer to just one thing. Thus, a traffic sign refers to rule that is valid in that particular situation. Instead, the flag of some state refers to that totality which is understood as nation. In the same way a cross for Christians refer to everything (s)he includes in her/his religion.

Instead of symbols, social movement scholars Kurt and Gladys Lang speak of social objects, which include, along with symbols, respected people (heroes, martyrs, victims), holy places and times, artefacts, customs and rituals³⁹.

One important aspect related to symbols is the concept of root metaphor. It means the analogies that people use when they frame the world⁴⁰. Society is understood differently if it is described as a machine or organism (structural-functionalism), scene (interactionism), vanity fair (Paul Bunyan and Evangelicalism) or God’s Kingdom (Social Gospel). Ancient myths explain that the world is a copy from the heavenly one (Mesopotamia), fight between order and chaos (Egypt), degeneration process (Greece) or Garden of Eden (Israel). All metaphors direct people see the “right” world order and justice differently.

Most societies have household (*oikos, familia*) as their nuclear unit. However, household is not just a social or economic unit but also a model – or root metaphor – for other institutions. Thus, a clan is an extended family, tribe the household of a patriarch (e.g. House of Israel). Even Nordic welfare state is often called People’s home.

Urbanisation and ruralisation are aspects that often define the way of life, the way how people see their neighbours, what kind of interaction is required and to whom they are responsible of their doings. Urban or rural way of life influence also in demography, technology (clusters of specialists), art (nomad art centres on portable issues), social ethics (high social density creates different kinds of communality than low), etc. Aristotelian definition of human as a “zoon politicon” and OT description of the desert as a place of purity are perhaps the two most known

³⁵ Brand 1994, 5f.

³⁶ Colin Renfrew (1975, 12ff.) sees a civilisation as a collectivity of autonomous territorial units that are in constant interaction. Thus, it is a group of states that share a similar world view.

³⁷ On the differences between sociological and anthropological understanding of culture, see Walker (2001).

³⁸ Geertz 1973, 91.

³⁹ Lang & Lang 1961, 291-332.

⁴⁰ On root metaphors, see Brown 1977.

examples of attitudes to cities. However, they are not necessarily opponents of each other: they can also live in symbiotic relationship.

Innovations can change societies and can be both catalysts for development as well as potential sources for discrimination⁴¹. For example, literacy was for long the privilege of the elite and tool for the power. From the Reformation onwards, it has been a tool for equality.

All innovations, however, do not change culture but have more gradual effect. For example moving from bronze to iron was, of course significant, but it did not change the fundamentals of societies. In the same way, moving from telex to telefax did not create similar change than email.

Economy⁴² creates the material basis for the well being of population. In the same time, they state in which way the wealth is produced and distributed. Economy has certain elements that can be summarised as follows:

Workforce is the human resource which utilises natural resources and transform them to products. Different kinds of products require different means of production and distribution and, thus, lead to different solutions how the workforce is organised and which kinds of social benefits /privileges and problems it creates.

Lack of materials is also a central force behind development of cultures. Sometimes the lack is temporary, like in the case of grass for the flocks of nomads and it is solved by moving to another pasture. Sometimes the lack is more permanent and then people must either substitute them with something else or find them outside their area. If people are not willing to move, most usual means of getting outside materials are trade and military campaigns – or various combinations of them. Forms of trade tell, among other things, about the power structures of society, cultural connections to other areas and the values of the society. There are three separate forms of trade that have different mechanisms: *local markets*, *domestic trade* and *foreign trade*.

POLICY defines how society is structured, how it implements its law and how society interacts with its neighbours. It can be divided to several dimensions. *Mode of rule* defines who holds the

⁴¹ Michael Mann (1986, 525) has made of a list of innovations that have had influence on power relations. They include Neolithic revolution, metallurgy, irrigation, writing, coins and hoplite army.

⁴² The concept of economic opportunity structures has been used in resource mobilization theory of social movements studies. John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (1977, 1224ff.) argue that the more resources the society has, the more there is social movements in it because movement compete of same resources than entertainment, religions, NGO:s and political parties. When there is no excess resources, all of them are used for basic needs. Their thesis is similar than Hannan and Freeman's (1977; 1989) ecological organization theory, which uses biological metaphors on the competition between organisations: a certain niche can sustain only limited number of organisations. Contrary to this, Karl Polanyi (2009, 98) argues that in tribal society, "the community keeps all its members from starving unless it is itself borne down by catastrophe, in which case interests are again threatened collectively, not individually."

power⁴³ and the political rights of different groups in society. Kingship, tyranny, oligarchy, democracy are issues that have interested social scientists at least since Aristotle. *State administration* tells how the ruler organises both his income revenue (taxes) and implementation of his duties. Moreover, state administration is often one source of either social stratification or social equality. *Law and order* are aspects of ruler's duties. While they give security and laws are significant method of implementing social reforms. *Foreign policy*, including war, influences on populations welfare, for example, by its impact on mortality, taxation (either by higher taxes or by compulsory army service), possibilities of immigration, and, when failed, by being occupied by foreigners.

OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES are not determinants of action but they determine in which general frames the action occurs. The analogy to chess illustrates opportunity structures rather well. There are the rules of the game that determine what moves are possible and what are not. After each move, there are several choices, of which some are good and some bad, but the player makes the final choice what to do in a situation. Economic and political opportunities are external constraints to any action. Cultural opportunity structures are more internalised and they constrain the actions of people more subtly. It is question of habits, norms, issues taken for granted, etc. Men usually take the values and norms of their beliefs and culture for granted, and these values limit the possible actions.

Although opportunity structures both limit and give possibilities for action, they are not static either. A weakness of the superpower creates an opportunity for satellite countries to free themselves from the yoke of their master, a new innovation can change both economic and political relationships and climate changes can alter the modes of lifestyle rather fundamentally.

“Fear God and keep his commandments⁴⁴” – Religion as a Model of Society

DEFINITION OF RELIGION is sometimes like trying to verbalise what kind of colour is blue. John Bowker started his introductory entry on religion in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* with a note:

A strange thing about religion is that we all know what it is until someone asks us to tell them. As Augustine said of time: ‘What, then, is time? If no asks me I know; but if I have to say what it is to one who asks, I know not.’ That has not stopped people trying to define religion.⁴⁵

Then Bowker gives examples of attempts to define religion. After that he continues:

⁴³ Contrary to most social theories, Michael Mann (1986, 28) distinguishes military power from political power arguing that military power as a state monopoly is relatively late innovation.

⁴⁴ Eccl 12:13

These and the many other definitions of religion... tell us much about religion, but because of their diversity, none of them on its own can tell us what religion is. Some emphasise the personal, others the social; some the beliefs, others the uses; some the structures, others the functions; some the private, others the public; some the mundane, others the transcendent; some the truth, others the illusion.⁴⁶

He then asks “Would the origins of the word itself take us any further?” Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (1879 s.w. *rēligiō*) in their *A Latin Dictionary* explain the meaning of the word *religio* as follows:

Reverence for God (the gods), the fear of God, connected with a careful pondering of divine things; piety, religion, both pure inward piety and that which is manifested in religious rites and ceremonies; hence the rites and ceremonies, as well as the entire system of religion and worship, the res divinae or sacrae, were frequently called religio or religiones (cf. our use of the word religion).

They also note that Cicero derived it from *relegere* (to gather things together) and Servius, Lactatinus and Augustine trace it from *religare* (to bind things together). In the latter case there is the “root lig, to bind, whence also lic-tor, lex, and ligare; hence, religio sometimes means the same as obligation.” While Lewis and Short favour the latter, for example, J. Den Boeft argues that most scholars 100 years after them favour the first one⁴⁷.

Thus, definition of religion in a way that it would satisfy everyone seems to be an impossible task. In spite of their significant efforts scholars of religion have not been able to come into agreement how to define it⁴⁸. As Winston L. King notes, all definitions have “struggled to avoid, on one hand, the Scylla of hard, sharp, particularistic definitions and, on the other hand, the Charybdis of meaningless generalities⁴⁹.” Moreover, as the anonymous writer of the article “Religion, definition of” in *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* says:

A specific definition of religion usually comes from a particular discipline or theory of religion. Thus, definitions that refer to religion as social representation are rooted in sociological explanations of religion, and definitions that refer to religion as symbolic of some mental or unconscious reality are based on psychology.⁵⁰

Thus all existing definitions are value-laden and they are usefully only in explaining which kind of frame the theorist has on religion⁵¹. John Bowker is evidently correct when he refers to Wittgensteins family resemblances⁵² and states that

⁴⁵ Bowker 2005, xviii.

⁴⁶ Bowker 2005, xviii.

⁴⁷ Boeft 1979, 247, 257f. n. 16.

⁴⁸ See examples in Bowker (2005, xviii), Alston (1972, 140f.), Huxley (1957) and Leuba (1912).

⁴⁹ King 1987, 283. On the problems of defining religion, see Ferm (1959); *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (1996, 893 909f.).

⁵⁰ *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (1996, 893f., 896). Alston (1972, 141), in turn, says that “[i]t is noteworthy that most of these definitions stress one aspect or another of religion to the exclusion of others.”

⁵¹ In theories of religion ideological preferences of scholars have played significant role. If we look at the classics of sociology, some of them reduced religion to structural determinants. Marx reduced religion to economic factors, to class-consciousness of upper classes, or to a false consciousness that is opium to people. Durkheim, in turn, reduced religion to self-worship of the society but saw it also as a social fact. Contrary to them, Weber saw religion as a force

[w]e can recognize a religion when we see one because we know what the many characteristics of religion are; but we would not expect to find any religion which exhibited all the characteristics without exception.⁵³

Thus, instead of giving one definition, Wittgensteinian family resemblance approach would give a list of characters that religions typically have⁵⁴. William P. Alston notes that

[w]hen enough of these characteristics are present to a sufficient degree, we have a religion. It seems that, given the actual use of the term “religion,” this is as precise as we can be.⁵⁵

Actually, dividing religion according to its dimensions has been the emphasis in modern studies of religion. Perhaps the best known classification is that of the old structural-functionalist theory’s three modes of motivational orientation: cognitive, affective and evaluative⁵⁶. Applied in the subsystem of religion, these mean the belief system or doctrine, cult and ethics.⁵⁷

ORIGINS OF RELIGION has been, along the definition theme, a vital part in anthropological theories of religion. However, there at least two big problems in these theories. First, as noted above, religion in these theories has often been treated as if all religions are the same. Bottéro’s distinction between “*prehistoric or traditional religion*, or, if we wish, a *popular or primitive religion*” and “*historical religions (or revealed religions)*” makes a point. The previous was according to him, “transmitted from parents to children, in the endless succession of generations, without any specific authority watching over them, without further constrains than those presiding, for example, over alimentary habits or over the laws of kinship.” The latter, in turn, requires “a figure... who comes to interrupt the course of traditional religion, on his own, by himself creating

by itself and emphasised the role of prophets. Around these classics, I have to confess that I feel more comfortable with Weber than with Marx. On metatheories, ideologies and personal life-experiences behind theories on religion, see Pals (1996), Bellah (1968) and Berger (1963). On the discussion on religion and social sciences, see Smith C. (1996) and Beckford (2003, 150-192).

⁵² Wittgenstein’s (1953, §§65-67) idea is that all individuals are unique but when they are gathered into a family picture, one can recognise common features between relatives.

⁵³ Bowker 2005, xxx.

⁵⁴ On the general problems of definitions, see Collier & Mahon (1993) and Muukkonen (2009).

⁵⁵ Alston 1972, 142.

⁵⁶ Parsons and Shils 1962.

⁵⁷ There are also other dimension theories that have left their mark into the study of religion. In their *Religion and Society in Tension*, Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark (1965) argue that religion has the following five dimensions: 1) experience, 2) ideology, 3) ritual, 4) knowledge and 5) consequences. Ninian Smart (1983; 1989), in turn, divides religion to 1) practical and ritual, 2) experimental and emotional, 3) narrative and mythical, 4) doctrinal, 5) ethical and legal, 6) social and institutional, and 7) material dimensions. William P. Alston (1972, 141f.) lists nine characteristics: “1. Belief in supernatural beings (gods). 2. A distinction between sacred and profane objects. 3. Ritual acts focused on sacred objects. 4. A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods. 5. Characteristically religious feelings... 6. Prayer and other forms of communication with gods. 7. A world view, or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein... 8. A more or less total organization of one’s life based on the world view. 9. A social group bound together by the above.” Also from Clifford Geertz’s (1973) definition of religion we can identify four dimensions of religion: interpretation of reality, moods, motivation and mechanisms of religion. Jean Bottéro (2001, 1-6), in his *Mesopotamian Religion*, mentions such aspects as religiosity or religious sentiment; representations, which forms mythological systems or theology; religious behaviour or worship; religious sentiment; and origins, which he divides into two of kind: those of prehistoric or traditional religion and those of

and diffusing *his* own religion; *his* emotional attitude with regard to the sacred, *his* personal conception of the sacred and the duties it imposes.”⁵⁸ However, most of the religious texts from ancient Orient tell neither about traditional nor historical forms of religion but of elaborated system that was not based on individual prophet. Traditional religion can be found in the forms of popular and family religions but the official religion was more a result of theological work of anonymous scholars⁵⁹.

William P. Alston gives another useful grouping: sacramental, prophetic and mystical. According to him “[s]acramental religion stresses sacred objects and ritual, prophetic religion stresses belief and morality, and mystical religion places chief emphasis on immediate experience and feeling⁶⁰.” He also notes that although religions may start as one type, they adapt characteristics of the other types in time but that

it is better not to think of types of religions, but religious tendencies that enter in varying proportions into the make-up of any actual religion. However, we can usually say that one tendency or another predominates in a given religion.⁶¹

In studies of the early religions, however, we have to remember that on prehistoric religions, all we have are artefacts and scarce remnants of oral myths. Thus, what we are able to find points to the sacral type of religion and partly to prophetic religion. Mysticism has not left any traces. In the historical period the picture changes along with the invention of writing but even then, mystical religion is probably underrepresented in the data since the mysteries were often transmitted orally. Moreover, the mysticism of Hinduism of which Alston is speaking is quite different from, for example, Eleusian mysteries in Hellas, which is more sacramental type of religion⁶².

Second problem of anthropological theories of religion is that they are often a-historic and based on the evolutionary ideology. Data is collected round the world from ‘primitive’ cultures and this data has then been compared with more ‘developed’ forms of religion mainly those of ancient Hellas and modern Christianity. When the theory states that all societies go through the same stages, there has not been need to look how in reality the known religions have emerged and developed during the time of which we have any data. For example, as M.J. Dresden notes, the teachings of Zoroastrianism show “affinity with the *Rig-Veda*, the collection of sacred texts of

historical or revealed religions.

⁵⁸ Bottéro 2001, 5.

⁵⁹ The list of revelation religions in ancient Orient is rather short and late. Bottéro (2001, 6) mentions Judaism (founded by Moses), Christianity (founded by Jesus) and Islam (founded by Mohammad). One could add Zoroastrianism in Persia and the attempt of Aknenaten in Egypt to this list. Save Zoroastrianism, they were later than ancient Mesopotamia.

⁶⁰ Alston 1972, 144.

⁶¹ Alston 1972, 144.

⁶² On Eleusian mysteries, see Willoughby (1929) and Mylonas (1961).

ancient India and the oldest known document in Sanskrit (twelfth-tenth centuries B.C.) to such extent that the assumption of a common origin is clearly indicated⁶³.” In spite of these common Aryan roots, developments of both branches have been quite different – contrary to evolutionist presumption.

Sociological theories have almost the same problem. The traditional view of structure-functionalism is that religion creates social order, legitimates power structures and social action. For example, if the society is seen as a duplication of transcendent realm (as in Mesopotamia and Medieval Christianity), it is very difficult to change since all changed are seen, then, violations against the divine will or the nature of the ultimate reality. Yet, every religion has faced changes in their history. No form of Christianity is the same as it was during the time of apostles. From the very beginning the church faced the problem how to cross the cultural barrier between Oriental and European thinking. First this was done by replacing the Hebrew concept of Messiah with the concept of ‘Son of God’, which was familiar from the Hellene mythology. Then, following the example of the Jewish philosopher Philo, Oriental ideal were explained with Hellene philosophy, especially with Plato. It is well known how different political determinants have modified Christianity since Emperor Konstantin. Religion always interacts with its surrounding and adapts to its needs. This notion is valid in the case of Mesopotamian religions as well. It is like the twin rivers of Mesopotamian plain: there are constant changes within the river bed but also changes of the river course. Still they are the same rivers.

Thus, in order to be able to speak of doctrines, rituals and ethics of any religion one must be aware of the changes that have occurred in that specific religion. Only after that one can define which historical period of religion (s)he is speaking.

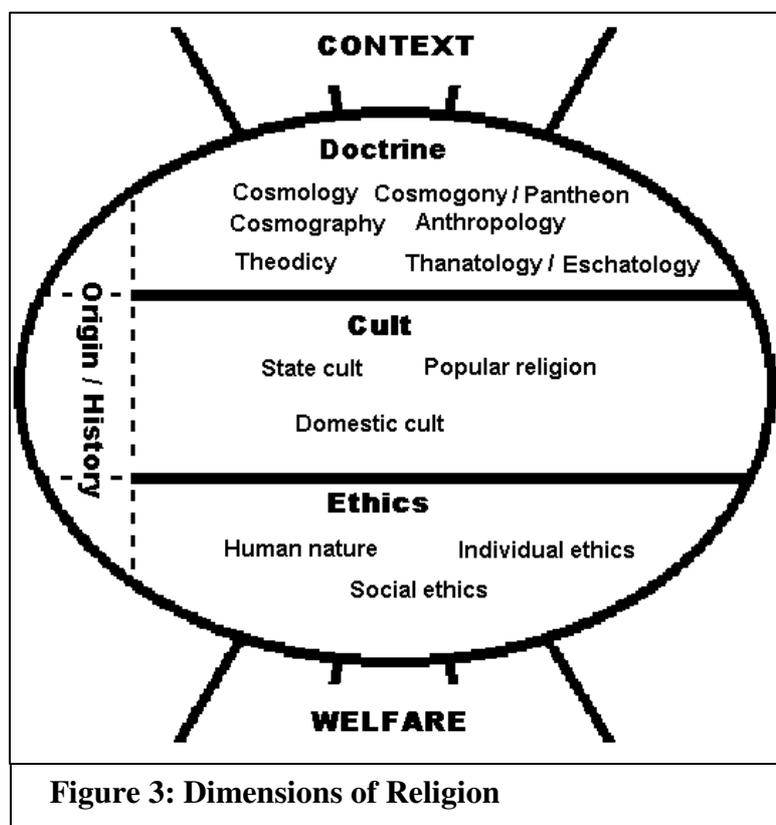
Dimensions of religion based on the discussion above can be reduced to three main categories: intellectual or doctrinal dimension, cult and ethics. All these reflect to some degree the values and practices of the time when religion was born – or the time it went through major changes. Since religion is mostly collective phenomenon, it requires some shared understanding of the immanent and transcendent reality. It is a *collective meaning system* that interprets the world and gives significance to meanings of things. This is the intellectual dimension of the religion and contains theories of cosmology and anthropology. While this intellectual dimension is mostly realm of the intellectuals, the results of their worlds are presented in mythologies and *rituals* which filter the knowledge to the general population. Finally, religion is also a powerful *dynamo for the human*

⁶³ Dresden 1980, 322. See also Duchesne-Guillemin (1969, 326f.) and Finegan (1952, 68f.).

action. It gives ethical values which direct people's behaviour. Once emerged, it starts to live its own life and influences its environment in the same time as it interprets it.

Combining the Geertzian model *of* – model *for* – presentation of religion with the structural-functionalistic theory, the scheme for religion would be as presented in the Figure 3 and in the text below.

To the basic dimensional division I have added elements from other theories. However, it must be stressed that distinctions made here are only analytical and dimensions are strongly interrelated. Moreover, it is not just one-way action from context to religion to welfare but there are causalities to other directions as well. For example, most dominant religions have significant economic role in their societies – let's just think about the influence of Christmas to the world economy. Along this, many religious bodies are significant land and capital owners although they are today only shadows compared to ancient Mesopotamian temples.



Doctrinal or intellectual dimension of the religion is one human's attempt to understand the world. On this intellectual dimension, Geertz writes:

As we are to deal with meaning, let us begin with a paradigm: viz., that sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethos – the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood – and their world view – the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order.⁶⁴

Thus, religion's first function can be seen as an attempt to explain the (cultural, economic and political) factors that influence people's lives. Ancient farmers were well aware that the fertility and success of harvest did not depend only on their own work. Forces of nature – gods, as they explained them – had the final word in their lives. In the same time, religion legitimised many social and political practises that had been proven effective by experience.

⁶⁴ Geertz 1973, 89.

Doctrinal or intellectual dimension can, in turn be divided into several dimensions. *Cosmology* explains how the world has been constructed, what parts it contains, who or what exist in it, and in what relations they are to each other. Cosmology can also be called as world view. *Cosmography* explains how people frame both heavenly⁶⁵ and earthly locations⁶⁶. *Cosmogony* explains how the world and its inhabitants came into existence⁶⁷. *Pantheon* is the description how the society of divinities is constituted⁶⁸. *Anthropology* explains origins of humankind, human nature and human's role in the world. Finally, *theodicy*, *thanatology* and *eschatology* are explanations of the problems of evil and suffering in the world as well as of the fate of a human after death and of the fate of the whole world. Like most other divisions, also this is just Weberian type analytical division. There are overlapping (for example, cosmogonic myths are also descriptions how the pantheon emerged).

Cult⁶⁹ is, as Ernst Cassirer put it, acting the myth⁷⁰. I understand it as the totality of ritual acts and practices aiming to create and maintain the contact to divinity.

Cultic action can take place in several levels. Karel van der Toorn has divided religion into two overlapping realms. The first one is the official state religion, which included the liturgy of the state cult, temples and shrines, priests and priestesses, cosmology of the elite⁷¹ and theological

⁶⁵ Perhaps the best known cosmographic description can be found in Dante Alighieri's *Commedia Divina*, which explained the Mediaeval cosmography intertwined in a story. As we well see, it was essentially a combination of the ancient Babylonian cosmography, Biblical views of heaven and earth, and that expressed in Platon's *Republic* (Plat.Rep. 10.514). Another famous cosmography is that found in the Egyptian *Book of the Death*, which tells how the deceased soul enters to the realm of Osiris.

⁶⁶ Before the Age of Exploration the world was usually framed as flat disc surrounded by the mythical ocean. Distant places were described as mythological locations of which there were only rumours. As we will see below, the oldest "world map" of this type comes from Bābilu from where it was copied to Hellas and to the Medieval Europe. Even the map of the 12th-century Arab geographer and scientist, Al-Idrisi (1456) has the same basic format although his perspective is slightly wider than those of the ancient world maps.

⁶⁷ Almost all cultures have some sort of creation myths. While creation myths focus on the emergence of the earth, cosmogonic myths include the emergence of the gods as well. For example, Biblical narrative of the creation does not tell anything of the emergence of inhabitants of the heaven while Hesiod's *Theogonia* starts from Chaos and birth of the first divine couple.

⁶⁸ Although pantheon (<Pantheon = "temple of all gods") literally refers to gods, the term can include lesser inhabitants (angels, demons) of the transcendent world as well.

⁶⁹ I use the concept of 'cult' in the meaning of "worship; reverential homage rendered to a divine being or beings(OED-OL, s.w. cult)", not in the same sense that sociology of religion has used it: "Designating cultural phenomena with a strong, often enduring appeal to a relatively small audience (idem.)." Thus, cult in this study means ritual life. The term 'Cult' comes from Latin *cultus* (a laboring at, labor, care, cultivation, culture – Lewis & Short 1879, s.w. cultus) and, along its secular meanings, in religious sense it refers to the care and maintenance of divine statues in temples.

⁷⁰ According to Cassirer (1946, 28) "[m]yth is the epic element in primitive religious life; rite is the dramatic element." On Cassirer's philosophy of religion, see, e.g., Stensland (1986).

⁷¹ Rather often the official religion reflects the world view of the elites and often legitimates the existing social order. Traditionally, this phenomenon has been taken as an evident of inbuilt conservatism in religion. However, as Christian Smith has argued, religion can also be a revolutionary force. In those cases, it is often some religious movement or religious sub- or counterculture that interprets the world from the perspective of the lower classes. For example, the collective identity of Israel was for a long that of the freed slaves (freedom from Egypt and freedom from Babilonian exile) and Christianity was also originally a religion of the lower classes. In the modern time,

formulations. The second is, as van der Toorn calls it, family religion. It was primarily question of worship of the god of the family (clan, tribe) and the cult of forefathers.⁷² An Egyptologist, Ashraf I. Sadek has also made a distinction into two forms of religion: state religion and popular religion. According to him, "popular religion in ancient Egypt is made up of the beliefs and practices of the Egyptian people themselves, outside of the endowed, state-run, secluded official temple cults⁷³." The distinction does not, however, go only according to class lines. Location and ethnicity are also important factors in religious divisions. Thus, religion is used also as a mark of distinction between groups. Thus, popular religion focuses both on local variants and folk religion in general.

Anthropologist Robert Redfield made, in his *Peasant Society and Culture* in 1956, a similar distinction between "great tradition" and "little tradition"⁷⁴. The "great tradition" is universal, intellectual, institutional in outlook, urban and represents the elite interests. "Little tradition", in turn, is often local, illiterate and represents the religiosity of lower classes or minorities. These two traditions *may* (but not necessarily) have quite different motivations and outputs – even in the same religious system.

If we combine the views of van der Toorn, Sadek and Redfield, we will have three levels of religion: state cult, popular religion and family religion. *State cult* focuses on the official cult and is performed by the leading elite. This cult is only partly public and is supported by the leaders of the country. *Popular religion* means both local religious practices and wide-spread forms of the commoners' public religious practices. Although it has loaned many elements from the state cult, the difference to state cult is that it is not officially supported by the state but the attitude runs from toleration to persecution. *Family religion* or *domestic cult* is an individual's foremost contact to religion. The family is in many cases the basic unit of this kind of cult practices although individuals practice some rituals also alone.

However, as Sadek correctly points out, they are not always mutually exclusive but often complement each other. In these cases, they lend elements from each other. On the other hand, in many other cases, they are mutually exclusive and even hostile towards each other. The best known

Methodism provided legitimacy for the protest of the British Labour Party in the 19th century and American Black Churches supplied resources for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's (On Black Churches and Civil Rights Movement, see Morris (1984). On Methodism and Labour Party, see Wearmouth (1957); Smith L. (1993), Pelling (1965, 129), Brand (1974, 16). On Biblical interpretation of their world by American slaves, see Alho (1976).

⁷² Van der Toorn 1996, 2ff.

⁷³ Sadek 1988, 2.

⁷⁴ Redfield 1969.

examples are from the Old Testament where cult of JHWH and that of Baal and Astarte were often in open fight⁷⁵.

Ethics is the third dimension of religion. In spite of the impact of structural factors on religions, we must remember that they are not just consequences of these needs. Erik Allard has argued that

sociologists have perhaps a tendency to often exaggerate the influence of structural factors. Factors attached to the structures of the society explain only part of the variation of religious behaviour of people or development of religious movements. Religion, however, is *sui generis*⁷⁶, a factor that itself moulds religious and other behaviour.⁷⁷

This reminds us of religion's third function – to provide a *model for* the society. This can mean that religions of various civilisations are not necessarily reflections of contexts in these societies. Instead, religions most probable have had such pre-historic roots that were developed already before inhabitants arrived to the area where they created their civilisation⁷⁸. We don't know from where Sumerians came to Mesopotamia but various myths tell, on one hand, that Sumerians as well as Akkadians used such concepts that would be natural in mountainous lands but not in alluvial plain. On the other hand, there are myths that tell that civilisation was brought to them from the sea. From this perspective, existing cultural, economic and political factors can also be seen as results of early religions that invading people applied in a new environment⁷⁹.

In any case, religions have developed powerful ethical systems that are normative for their followers. Ethics state what both society and individual should do in different social situations. Altruism in most religions is seen as an act of piety and selfishness is seen as a sin. Irrespectively the nature of human character, there exist some kinds of religious norms what a human should do and what is prohibited. Moreover, there are norms that dictate who is responsible for some duties and to whom they must be directed.

From the welfare perspective, ethics can be separated the following aspects. Related to anthropology, there is the *question of human character*, virtues and vices. Is a human basically good

⁷⁵ Note that religion of Baal and Astarte and JHWH were state religions in different times and persecuted each other when in power.

⁷⁶ Religion as *sui generis* is typical in Weberian tradition where religion is not reduced to some other phenomenon of society like in Marxist (material factors), Durkheimian (society's self-worship) or Freudian (father-relation) traditions. Weber did not theorise of the origins of religion but of its impact on societies. For me, religion is in Durkheimian terms, a social fact.

⁷⁷ Allard 1986, 37f. (my translation from the original Finnish text).

⁷⁸ Aryans, mentioned above, were one typical ancient example of people who brought their religion with them. A typical example from the new era is the United States. Like Richard Niebuhr (1937) has argued, the the first Puritans who came to the continent had a vision to build 'God's Kingdom on earth.' American Puritanism cannot, thus, be reduced to economic or social conditions of the 16th century America. Instead, the social matrise was created according to the Puritan ideals. In the same way, Communism did not born in Russia but in Germany.

⁷⁹ A good example is the role of Puritans in America. Richard H. Niebuhr (1937) argues that while Protestantism in Europe was fighting for its existence, these early American settlers – actually refugees because of their religion – started to build their version of kingdom of God on earth.

or bad and whether (s)he is capable for good works. *Individual ethics* define how an individual should act in her/his relations to other people, to his gods and to his environment. *Social ethics* define how the society as a whole should treat its members and outsiders. In describing social ethics, Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is useful. The *Gemeinschaft* type ethics is based on "organic" sense of unity. Society is a model of Celestine realm and everything must be according to the requirements of this realm. The *Gesellschaft* type ethics, instead, is based on agreements. It is more like Rousseau's political contract than Biblical type God's Law. In short, the emphasis is on keeping the contract, not following the laws of celestial order.

In a sense, this list seems to form a path from doctrines via cult to ethics - and from ethics to philanthropic and welfare practises. However, like I have emphasised above, the traffic is to all directions.

"A kind man benefits himself"⁸⁰ – Welfare

Following Geertz' *model of - model for*-scheme, philanthropy is seen as an ethical outcome of those cultural values that have been stored in religious thought. It is evident that the model is just analytical simplification but in a nutshell: social values determine what is regarded as good and worth to achieve. At this point it would be good to discuss a little what is welfare and how it can be measured.

One possibility to study welfare is utilising the welfare dimensions scheme that has been developed by Erik Allardt for Nordic comparative welfare research. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Johan Galtung's theorising of basic needs he defined that dimensions of welfare are defined with a slogan *having* (standard of living⁸¹), *loving* (communality⁸²) and *being* (opposite to alienation⁸³)⁸⁴. These can, actually, be seen parallels to economic, political and cultural aspects of the context.

However, although functional in modern Nordic society, the way Allardt describes the content

⁸⁰ Prov. 11:17

⁸¹ According to Allardt (1989, 4), this includes economic resources (income and wealth); housing conditions (measured both by space available and housing amenities); employment (usually described by the occurrence or absence of employment); working conditions (noise and temperature at workplace, physical work routine, measures of stress); health (various symptoms – or their absence – of pain and illness, availability of medical aid); education (years of formal education).

⁸² Allardt (1989, 6) divides this to neighbourhood relations, family relations, active friendships, NPO relations and working relations.

⁸³ Allardt (1989, 7) divides this to possibility to make decisions on her/his life, political activities, leisure, meaning of work and enjoying the nature.

raises some serious theoretical and methodological doubts. First, one could argue whether employment, working conditions, health and education really belong to basic needs or *having*-values. Second, which is more serious objection, most issues that Allardt has stressed, require modern survey methodology and are impossible to study with the available artefacts from the pre-modern civilisations. Nobody can say which kinds of “active patterns of friendship” or “relationships to work mates” people in non-literate societies have had in history. Therefore, Allardt’s model in historical studies can be utilised only as a heuristic device.

Another possibility would be to look at the major industries of welfare like Lester Salomon and his associates made in the comparative study of *Global Civil Society*. In their study, social care, health care and education⁸⁵ recruited 3/4 of all employees in philanthropic and welfare activities⁸⁶. These industries could also roughly be equated with Allardt’s three values: social care (having / loving), health care (having / loving) and education (being).

Along these three basic industries, especially Nordic welfare states have emphasised the aspect of equality as an integral part of welfare. This, however, does not work in the case of ancient civilisations. In most historical societies there has been no equality – on the contrary, the civilisations have been strictly hierarchical. Instead many cultures have some understanding of righteousness or justice⁸⁷. Thus, in spite of structural inequalities in the society, there are certain norms how to treat the lowest classes in the society. Thus, it seems that the concept of justice would be more in place than equality in the ancient societies.

However, this approach has also its weaknesses. First, it is not possible to get similar data from historical records than from their survey (which has even in modern society great difficulties in collecting it). Second, it can be argued that these aspects of modern welfare did not exist in ancient societies in the same way that they exist today. That is a partly truth, but not the full truth. It is true that educational level in western countries is higher than in any previous society but if we skip the *level* of modern education and focus on differences inside the educational system, ancient Hellas and modern Italy or even the US⁸⁸ are not so different from each other. Then, if we say that the

⁸⁴ Allardt 1976a, 9. In English, see, for example, Allardt (1972; 1973; 1975; 1976b; 1989).

⁸⁵ Education became an integral part of the welfare when Pietists in Halle Institutions chose it as a means for eliminating poverty. See, e.g., Ipfling & Chambliss (1994, 36) and Sørensen (1998). Although formal education in ancient societies was limited to few, apprenticeship was in wide use.

⁸⁶ Salomon & al 1999, 16

⁸⁷ In Babylon, there was the concept of *misharum* (justice, righteousness), in Ancient Egypt, the central concept was *ma’at* (balance, right order, justice, righteousness) and in Classical Greece there was the concept of *dike* (justice).

⁸⁸ According to 2003 *International Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey* (ALL), 47% of Italians are in the literacy level 1 and can do little more than read a short text to find one piece of information, locate a piece of information based on a literal match, and complete one-step math tasks such as counting or sorting dates. In the US, the amount is 20% according to the same report. According to The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) report, 43 % of

services of the best doctors were available only to the wealthiest, so where is the difference? It is true in our societies as well – even in Nordic countries which boast of their equality. My point is that in spite of the general increase of technology, wealth and knowledge, there are always elites that have better education, health care and status than the rest of the population.

The elements that have been picked from the abovementioned theories do not form a strict matrix according to which various societies could be framed. Instead, they form some sort of checklist which give hints to which kinds of clues should be aware of when reading material. In addition to that, it would be more fruitful to focus on qualitative aspects of these industries – for example, what kinds of social care there was in a society that is studied and how it was justified. Qualitative aspect, moreover, has also importance for today since the values and practices have been transmitted through centuries to modern world.

Combining the elements of the theories above, welfare solutions are studied in this study from four perspectives as the figure and the list below show. In addition to these, one should always be sensitive to such issues that are important to the people of that special culture and what modern welfare research does not recognise.

JUSTICE⁸⁹ or righteousness refers to the ideals and principles of the society on welfare of the population by defining the status, rights and duties of various groups in the society. In ancient cultures dependent groups (slaves⁹⁰, serfs, helots, freed, women, children) were the lowest strata of the society and, thus, their treatment reveals how the culture understood and implemented justice. Along with dependent classes, the society had to define how it treated its nominally free lower classes. Women's status is a special case independent of their class status and has an impact on their welfare.

The interaction of religion and society is not one-way influence like the hour-class figure would indicate. Thus, there is not just 'context influences religion which determines the welfare'-causality. Instead, religion, while influenced by cultural, economic and political factors, also influences these sectors. From welfare perspective, this impact is important when it prevents/hindrances or supports/allows depressive treatment of the weakest segments of society.

the US population are either 'below the basic' literate level (14%) or have the basic literary skills (29%). These people, according to the report, "struggle to read a bus schedule so they can travel across town, have difficulty using an ATM machine, or find it hard to fill out an average job application." (*The State of Adult Literacy* 2006, 6, 13, 16)

⁸⁹ On justice in the ancient world, see *Social Justice in the Ancient World* (1975).

⁹⁰ On the studies on ancient slavery, general histories of slavery and theories of slavery, see Horsley (2008), Patterson (1977 407-413, 428-437; 1982; 2001a,b), Wirtz (2001), Vogt (1974, 170-210), Finley (1968).

- Culture receives from religion many issues from general habits to scientific innovations. Religion offers, namely, the general world view of population⁹¹. In the same time religious institutions often are concentrations of knowledge since priests are usually among the most educated segment of population in any society.
- Politics is influenced by religion by sacralising the norms that are utilised in interaction of individuals and groups. These norms define the status of people from ruler to slaves and their treatment⁹². They define the mores of population as well as codes of diplomacy and war.
- Economy is influenced by religion not only by norms (for example: when it is allowed to work) but by the economic power of it. Religious practices, on one hand, create certain markets, like gifts in certain times of the year or lifespan. Religious institutions, on the other hand, have often significant properties that just their use has an impact on society. More so if, as Polanyi states, the redistribution of society's wealth is directed through religious institutions.

SOCIAL CARE⁹³ that contains maintenance during unemployment, sickness, imprisonment or after catastrophe was in many cases a religious duty. For example, the so-called subsidiarity principle has been part of the Mediterranean social care at least for last five thousand years⁹⁴. According to it, the family is the basic source of aid. If it is not capable for it, then kin, neighbours and the community are responsible for the aid. For this reason, private philanthropy or almsgiving has been significant part of the religious life in most historical religions. If the private philanthropy is not sufficient, temple or religious institutions have been responsible for the welfare of population since the dawn of mankind. State, according to subsidiarity principle, is the last resort of welfare activity.

Therefore I focus on the following industries of the society and look what kinds of social care and to whom they provided.

- Poor relief is an attempt to upkeep those who cannot take care of themselves. While families and kin are seen as the mainline of upkeep, poor relief is mostly an exceptional mechanism that targets special groups. The Biblical “widows, orphans and strangers”

⁹¹ Even in secularised western societies, it must be remembered that the philosophical concepts that are used are modified by theologians through the centuries.

⁹² Note that women's and children's statuses are special cases which are independent of their class status and which has an impact on their welfare.

⁹³ On pre-Christian welfare and philanthropy, see Bolkestein (1967).

⁹⁴ As mentioned above, an early version of subsidiarity principle can be seen in the *Code of Hammurabi* (§32) but there only in the case of buying the prisoners of war free.

emphasise the collective responsibility of those who do not have kin to take care of them. Along those three groups, handicapped people and sick can be included to these who are in need of special social care.

- Elderly care, while often included in philanthropic activities, is something that almost every family has to face. Thus, the important questions are how the families organise the care of their old people, what impact does the old ones have on their pension years and what to do if there is no kin?
- Catastrophe aid is a mechanism how the society tries to recover from different natural or social catastrophes. In agricultural societies, the most common threat is the drought or its opposite, flood. Failure in harvest in succeeding years can easily lead to impoverishment of the family. In large scale, impoverishment of the middle class threatens the stability of the whole society. Thus, there must be a mechanism to ensure the existence of stable peasant class.

HEALTH CARE⁹⁵, although part of social care, can be treated separately. Every society needs some basic ways how to treat illnesses, wounds and birth of babies.

- Hygienic, purity laws and other preventive methods are the basis for the health care. They are mostly accessible also to those who have no access to professional medical care.
- Nursing and services of midwives are forms of health care that were available to most of the population.
- Medical care consists of sorcery, surgery, herbal treatment, etc. Some of these practices have been available to the whole population but some have been depended on the patients' ability to pay. However, in some cases medical treatment has been seen as a religious duty and given free to everyone.

EDUCATION⁹⁶ - in some form or other - has always been a part of human culture starting perhaps from hunter father showing his son how to make a trap and which roots are edible. Later it became a device of improving or maintaining individual's social status. An integral part of the welfare it became when Pietists in Halle Institutions chose it as a means for eliminating poverty⁹⁷.

There are basically three kinds of education

- Elementary education that is given to children at home.

⁹⁵ On history of ancient medicine, see Cumston (1996). The religious aspect in medicine is stressed in the anthology *Health/Medicine and the Faith Traditions* (1982)

⁹⁶ On ancient education, see Bowen (1972).

⁹⁷ See, e.g., Ipfling & Chambliss (1994, 36) and Sørensen (1998). Although formal education in ancient societies was limited to few, apprenticeship was in wide use.

- Vocational education that is given in some sort of educational arrangement (a school, a master - apprentice relationship)
- Formal schooling that is given by professional scholars either to a general population or to small elite.

As seen above, focusing on the aspects of the philanthropy/welfare contains the content of the action, the (institutional) actor and the subject of the action. In doing the analytical distinction between families, state, market, religious institutions and voluntary associations/foundations one has to remind that this is, as already stated, analytical because, especially, state, religious institutions and foundations are often in symbiotic relationship in pre-modern societies.

Thus, the model for the analysis of each epoch leads first to look what potentials the different opportunity structures create for the welfare/philanthropic solutions. Then the model leads to look at how the religion interprets these opportunities in official, folk piety and family level. Finally, it leads to focus on the practical applications of general ethical principles as explicated by religion and how different welfare applications are based on different ethical principles.

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