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Social Theory

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- The category of the sacred was central to the 'problems' of order and meaning that preoccupied classical sociology, and it remains key to understanding the distinctive contribution of social theory to the study of religion and society.

- Both Durkheim and Weber conceptualized the sacred in terms of extraordinary phenomena that influence social action through the manner in which they transform embodied experience, though each proposed two contrasting modalities of the sacred, enabling us to identify four distinct forms overall.

- First, Durkheim provides the basis for a conception of the 'socio-religious' sacred, constructed and maintained through other-worldly cosmologies and practices that sanctify social life as a whole as religious, characteristically having a de-differentiating effect on society in that all ideas, actions, and social spaces become subject to religious direction and control.

- Second, Durkheim enables us to conceptualize a 'bio-economic' modality in capitalist economies where anything—whether experienced as worldly or other-worldly, 'secular' or religious—can be 'set apart' from, and emotionally experienced as 'special' in relation to, mundane life. This modality is characteristic of highly differentiated social contexts and can be associated with the consumerization of the sacred, in light of its conformity to broader patterns of consumer choice and commodity fetishism.

- Third, the 'transcendent sacred,' a central explanatory device in Weber's account of the Protestant ethic, highlights how forces experienced as extraordinary and other-worldly can co-exist with a social sphere differentiated as secular. Here, those who identify themselves as religious may seek to steer society via other-worldly directed norms and disciplines, but the social and the sacred are essentially distinct.

- Fourth, Weber highlighted the experiential impact of the extraordinary scope and power of the forces of rationalization and bureaucratization embedded within modern law and governance—forces bereft of religious, other-worldly orientations. Extending subsequently into the realm of bio-politics, stretching across the varied sectors of society while effecting a de-differentiating impact upon them, and even redefining life and death itself, this suggests a 'bio-political' modality of the sacred that builds on Weber's attentiveness to the extraordinary power that modern law and governance have over our lives and bodies.

- Taken together, these four modalities can be used to provide new insights into a range of contemporary sacred phenomena, including resurgent forms of Islam and Christian Pentecostalism, the fetishization of commodities, and the increasingly powerful bio-political governance of bodies.

Introduction

Social theory is located at the philosophical end of the spectrum of sociological activity. It operates conceptually at a high level of generality and is focused on the systematic analysis and explanation of social phenomena. From its late nineteenth-century origins, it developed a diverse set of analytical models and approaches designed to highlight and explain a wide range of issues associated with structural and cultural change, the substantive and functional features of meaning and behaviour, the relationships between selves and societies, and human agency and constraint. From the late twentieth century onwards, this diversification of social theory intensified further through the emergence of general accounts of a variety of issues: e.g., gender; race; ethnicity and post-colonialism; developments in critical and cultural theory; structuralism and post-structuralism; actor-network theory; and the 'new' materialism. Alongside this proliferation of concerns, social theorists have engaged in disputes concerning the relationship between theoretical and empirical matters, normative or 'scientific' authority claims, and methodological priorities (Coleman 1990; Hedström/Swedberg 1998; Wagner 2001). Though the sheer scope of its inquiries has sometimes blurred what distinguishes social theory from cognate approaches, we can identify questions concerning social order and meaning as core concerns from the start through to the present. Not only are these key to

understanding the emergence of influential synthetic or integrative approaches aiming to bridge divergent philosophical and theoretical traditions (Parsons 1968, 1991; Berger 1967; Habermas 1984; 1987), they are also the ones that have enabled several of its perspectives to have a major impact on the study of religion. This is particularly evident among those writings that have utilized the notion of the 'sacred' to interrogate the demarcation of the religious relative to the secular.

The background to these developments returns us to social theory's origins, wherein perceptions of religion's implication in problems of order and meaning were central to the writings of classical sociological thinkers. At stake here were questions about how social and cultural orders could operate in modern contexts characterized by the decline of Absolutist governments and the fracturing of those 'sacred canopies' provided by notions of divine order. For Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber, traditional forms of Christianity had been damaged by the corrosive impacts of rationalization and pluralization sweeping Europe. The decline of these particular forms was not usually taken to be indicative of the obsolescence of religious forces altogether, however, and most classical theorists suggested that there existed religious forces possessing continued (if variable) efficacy in processes of group formation and meaning making. At their most effective, indeed, such forces not only harnessed a range of cognitive and 'non-rational' bodily affects and practices to collective norms, providing a basis on which social order could be secured, but also provided individuals with answers to fundamental questions regarding life and death (Shilling/Mellor 2001).

These classical accounts were highly influential (Wrong 1994), but have been criticized for what is perceived to be their inherent tendency towards functionalist understandings of religion that fail to account for its complexity and diversity (McCauley/Lawson 1984). Subsequent writings have also identified in this work a Western bias that universalizes what some view as a specifically Christian and European demarcation of the 'religious' from the 'secular,' and privileges the secular as the sphere within which religions operate as human constructions possessed of social functions (Milbank 1990; Asad 1993).

Such critiques may hold with regard to crude functionalist models based upon partial readings of classical social theorists, but possess limited relevance for the actual accounts developed in these earlier writings. For Durkheim, Weber, and others, the social directionality of religion—the capacity

of religious activity to reshape social norms and redirect social action through a range of cognitive, emotional and experiential phenomena—is of far greater interest than some essentially conservative functional contribution to social order. This concern with the directionality of religion, moreover, remains relevant to issues that range far beyond the differentiated and privatized contexts that have been viewed as culturally specific to post-Reformation Western modernity, and it is in this regard that classical theorists attributed such importance to the category of the sacred.

The Category of the Sacred

In hailing the development of the category of the sacred as the distinctive contribution of social theory to the social sciences, Robert Nisbet (1993, 221) highlights its socially creative connotations, as well as its explanatory breadth. It deserves recognition as social theory's key "unit-idea," he suggests, because it enables us to analyse the reshaping and redirecting of social forms across the totality of myth, dogma, and ritual in religious life as well as in relation to a range of "ostensibly non-religious phenomena such as authority, status, community and personality". In facilitating such analyses, conceptions of the sacred also enable us to interrogate interactions between the religious and the secular that have a socially productive character—thereby implicating it in questions concerning the economy, state, society and personal identity—without reducing religion to its social functions or assuming that it is fated to struggle for survival within an increasingly dominant secular sphere.

Nisbet's concern is with the philosophical underpinnings of sociological thought, but there is a strong case for arguing that the category of the sacred continues to underpin social theory's distinctive contribution to the study of religion and society. In pursuing this, we ground our analysis in the writings of two key classical theorists. Weber's and Durkheim's accounts of religion and society are routinely portrayed as opposed, reflecting broader oppositions between the methodological individualism of much German social thought and the methodological holism characteristic of the French philosophical tradition. What conventional accounts overlook, however, is that they converge in suggesting that the embodied experience of certain phenomena as 'extraordinary' relative to mundane day-to-day life, irrespective of the religious or secular enframing of such phenomena, influences social action in potentially transformative ways (Mellor/Shilling 1997; 2014).

Durkheim, Weber and the Sacred

Durkheim insists there are things considered sacred, "set apart" from egoistic organic life, accessed

through "positive" and "negative" rites that stimulate effervescent experiences possessing the capacity

to join individuals to a collectivity imbued with forms of collective consciousness (Durkheim 1995,

138, 212). In a distinct yet related analysis, Weber also explores how phenomena encountered as

'sacred', 'enchanted,' and 'charismatic' stimulate in people a socially creative experience of distance

between extraordinary life and routinized existence (Weber 1968, 789–90 818–828, 111–157; 1948,

328, 155). Extraordinary phenomena steer society by influencing the practical techniques through

which bodies are trained: adjusting the "psycho-physical apparatus" of humans rouses in them a

propensity to intervene in their environment on the basis of priorities that are felt as, and thought to

be, 'special' (Weber 1968, 1156). Focused on the relational, socially constructed, and embodied

character of extraordinary phenomena (Anttonen 2000; Taves 2009), such accounts contrast with

more restrictive, arguably neo-theological, understandings of the sacred sometimes found in religious

studies—including Eliade's (1963) conception of 'hierophany' (confined to this-worldly experiences

of something 'wholly other'), and James's (1983 [1902]) psychological account (confined to ineffable

as well as noetic experiences generative of exceptional knowledge)—and highlight the broad terrain

addressed by 'the sacred' as conceived of within social theory.

  If the convergences between Durkheim and Weber highlight the analytical significance of the

sacred in terms of its impact upon societies, cultures and embodied subjects, it is their internally

divergent assessments of the precise direction of sacred forces that help develop our understanding

further. First, both, in different ways, are attentive to the fact that experiences of phenomena as sacred

may possess strong or weak/non-existent other-worldly dimensions, with implications for whether we

categorize them as 'religious' or not. Here, 'other-worldly' refers to social constructions of a

supernatural or theological character, which are taken to characterize religious rather than non-

religious constructions of the sacred. The term therefore has primarily a relational, rather than

ontological or metaphysical, character. Second, again in different ways, both recognise the divergent

implications of distinct forms of the sacred in relation to patterns of differentiation and de-

differentiation, with implications for debates about secularization. Taking these divergent positions together, we suggest that their work provides us with a basis for identifying four distinct modalities of the sacred which can be termed the socio-religious, bio-economic, transcendent, and bio-political.

Modalities of the Sacred

It is Durkheim who provides us with a conception of the 'socio-religious' modality of the sacred. Developed in his account of the universal significance of religion and the sacred, the socio-religious sacred is constructed and maintained through an other-worldly cosmology and practices that sanctify society as religious (Durkheim 1995). Centred on tribal groups, but concerned with the basic processes informing all societies, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life reveals a pervasive intermingling of religious and social phenomena. Social life can only exist as a result of it being permeated by strong other-worldly elements (other-worldly in that they transpose individuals from natural organic existence to what is constructed and experienced as a supernatural social and moral existence). These elements that impart a de-differentiating quality to society.

Elsewhere in his writings, however, Durkheim provides grounds for conceptualizing the sacred in what we can call 'bio-economic' terms. This modality is evident in modern societies "possessed of an advanced capitalist economy and division of labour in which anything, including worldly phenomena, can be 'set apart' from, and emotionally experienced as 'special' in relation to mundane life. Here, individuals' physical, biological properties become subject to patterns of attraction, stimulation, and manipulation by commercial products and processes: forms of the extraordinary persist, but they have weak or non-existent other-worldly elements and develop on the basis of personal preferences operating within segmented societies that prize "the cult of the individual" (Durkheim 1984, 122). This is quite distinct from the socio-religious sacred, and it is suggestive of the consumerization of the sacred: incorporating non-religious and—insofar as they retain some other-worldly relational referents—religious forms, within a market of lifestyle options that appeal directly to the biologically grounded, yet commercially shaped, emotions of individuals.

While Durkheim provides us with a platform on which to investigate socio-religious and bio-economic modalities of the sacred, it is Weber (1991) who accounts for what we term the

'transcendent sacred,' a central explanatory device in his account of the Protestant ethic, secularization, and disenchantment. Here, forces experienced as extraordinary are construed in supernatural terms but, in contrast to Durkheim's account of the socio-religious sacred, these are deemed to be distinct from the organic or 'immanent' processes that constitute social life, not only in origin but in their on-going personal or communal significance. While Durkheim emphasizes the pervasive, all encompassing social influence of the sacred and religion, Weber's analysis of the transcendent sacred highlights a modality wherein it is accepted that there exists a worldly existence, a 'secular' sphere, distinct from religious forms, even though those who identify themselves as religious may seek to steer secular society in particular directions via other-worldly directed norms and disciplines.

Having identified a transcendent modality of the sacred bonded to a major form of religion, Weber was nonetheless insistent that the forces of rationalization and bureaucratization embedded within modern law and governance were bereft of religious, other-worldly orientations. These forces not only eroded religion, but also extended subsequently into the realm of bio-politics, stretching across the varied sectors of society and effecting a de-differentiating impact upon them through their pervasive social influence and power. Weber himself did not see such phenomena as sacred, but he did highlight the experiential impact of the extraordinary scope and power of the technological domination of science in the management of life. Indeed, Giorgio Agamben's (1998) association of the sacred with a system of this-worldly governmentality that reduces human existence to 'bare life' —a reduction that cuts across social differentiations and even defines life and death itself— suggests a 'bio-political' modality of the sacred that builds on Weber's attentiveness to the extraordinary power that modern law and governance have over our lives and bodies.

In short, Durkheim and Weber enable us to utilize the category of the sacred not as a referent for a substantive phenomenon wholly 'other' to day-to-day life, but for a number of analytically distinct modalities, competing 'sacreds', wherein experiences of certain relationally constructed phenomena as 'extraordinary' relative to mundane life enframe, shape, and direct social life and action in specific ways —some of which may be called religious and some of which may not. The socio-religious and the transcendent modalities have a religious character, which we can define as

being characterized by other-worldly orientations towards worldly activity. The bio-economic and the bio-political, in contrast, are associated with secular, non-religious developments, possessing weak or non-existent other-worldly aspects. It is the transcendent and bio-economic modalities that share an acceptance of, or accommodation to, social differentiation, however, with the socio-religious and bio-political possessing a de-differentiating orientation. This can be presented diagrammatically (fig. 1) as follows:

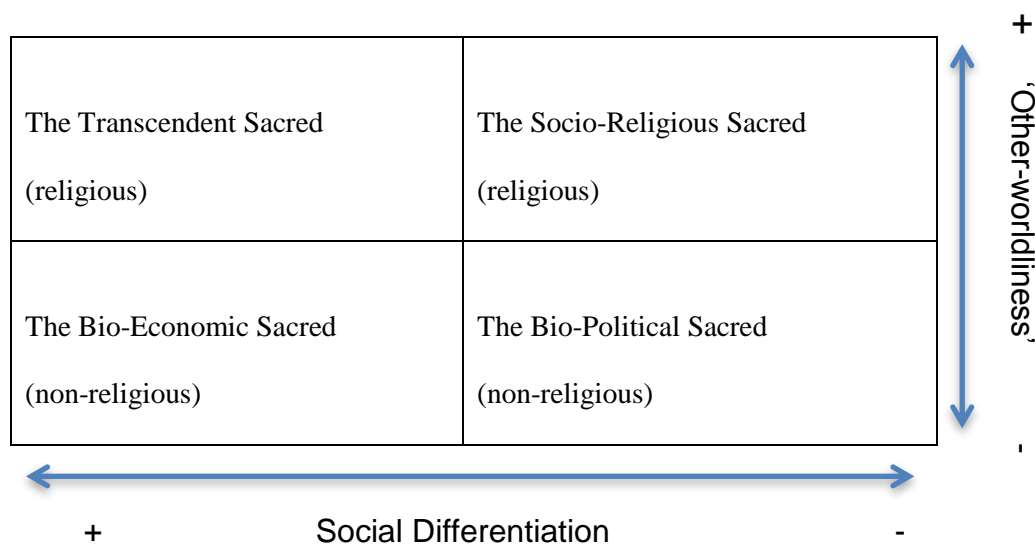|		
The Transcendent Sacred (religious)	The Socio-Religious Sacred (religious)	+ 'Other-worldliness'
The Bio-Economic Sacred (non-religious)	The Bio-Political Sacred (non-religious)	-
+ Social Differentiation -		

Fig.1. Modalities of the Sacred.

Condensed and abstract though this typology is, we shall now explicate its utility by illustrating how the sacred remains core to the study of religion and society in social theory today.

The Socio-Religious Sacred

Durkheim (1995) argued that the socio-religious sacred was a modality elementary to all societies, although his development of his analysis through anthropological data on 'primitive' aboriginal beliefs and practices led many to question its contemporary relevance. Indeed, Durkheim's (1952 [1897]) own emphasis in other writings on the key role of Protestant individualism in shaping modern life implies a poor fit between the socio-religious sacred and modernity. In the context of the global resurgence of Islam, however, we can utilize this modality to cast fresh light on the socio-religious

sacred in the current era, particularly in the context of widespread anxieties about the incorporation of Islam into Western culture and politics evident in debates today (Turner 2010, 655), as well as the often tumultuous responses of some Muslim communities to perceived profanations of those material emblems of the sacred that are the foundations for a distinctively Muslim social and bodily existence (D'Souza 2012).

Islam and the Socio-Religious Sacred

We are not suggesting that Durkheim's model can account for the diverse and complex traditions of belief and practice characteristic of one of the world's major religions. Nevertheless, insofar as some Islamic forms exhibit a commitment to a 'total' socio-religious society, they are expressive not only of the moral force Islam can exercise over those who constitute the community of the umma, but also the ways in which this form of the sacred challenges conceptions of social life as differentiated in religious and non-religious terms. Islam's strong focus on the primacy of bonds with other Muslims above local particularities, cultures, and institutional variables is, for example, embodied in the enactment of obligations to other followers encoded within salat and in the way that these signal patterns of social inclusion or exclusion relative to believers and non-believers, rather than the construction of a social sphere that embraces both (Henkel 2005, 489, 492). It is also evident in the fact that the key functionaries of sharia are not priests but interpreters of law, thus revealing the close link between legal regulation, social solidarity, and constructions of other-worldly authority that Durkheim identifies as central to the socio-religious sacred.

A recognition of the centrality of law to Islam, and the anxieties about the potential conflict with macro-level and meso-level differentiation it implies, is reflected in Bruce's (2003, 234) suggestion that desires for secession from, or moves to overcome, alternative systems of law are endemic to Islam. Certainly, the relative severity of many punishments encoded into some formulations of this law, in comparison to secular systems, echoes Durkheim's account, most notably with regard to penalties for apostasy (Rahman 2006). This is not only the ultimate offence against the divine, but also a challenge to what Durkheim called the 'naturalization' of the sacred, i.e., the social construction of human embodiment that defines its 'natural' character and identity in other-worldly

terms, through the construction of a 'Muslim body' (a process that reveals the centrality of the socio-religious sacred to the organic realm of embodiment as well as to society). This importance placed on the naturalization of the sacred is also evident in widespread concerns within many Islamic communities about the permissibility of organ transplants between Muslim and non-Muslim bodies (Hayward/Madill 2003, 397). The conception of the purity of Muslim bodies signals both a powerful differentiation against impure, non-Muslim, bodies and a defence against the differentiation of the religious from the social or the organic. It is an insurance against the body being aligned with or containing the potential to generate anything that might profane the strictures of Islam.

These dimensions of the socio-religious sacred associated with Islam indicate how this modality offers a potent means for imparting a particular directionality to social life, since constructions of other-worldly sacred norms, values, bodily experiences, and symbolic systems come to have a pervasive influence on identity, action, and the relative positioning of communities in normative terms. It is, in consequence, a directionality that can exist in a relationship of tension and conflict with other cultural values. This potential for conflict is emphasized in Durkheim's (1995) argument that threats of profanation to the socio-religious sacred are received as a danger so great that they can warrant acts of deadly violence. Recognition of this is central to Ivan Strenski's (2003) discussion of the violent expenditure of human life amongst Palestinian 'suicide bombers.' For Strenski (2003, 19, 26), "sacrifice" rather than "suicide" best captures the actions of these bombers: they "become holy" within their community through the effervescent sacrifice of themselves and their victims (sacrifices that reveal subordination to greater socio-religious imperatives); a process that spills over into the sacralization of the sites of their violence, the circulation of heroic stories about their lives, the offerings given to their bereaved families, the commemoration of them in prayer, and the revitalization of their communities in the face of conflict. The assertively religious nature of such other-worldly legitimations of violent sacrifice operates in conflict with a wider societal/international context experienced as antagonistic to that religion's normative expressions of effervescence and associated conceptions of ultimate importance.

The Transcendent Sacred

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Rather than categorizing all social life and bodily experience as an engagement with the sacred or with what threatens to profane the sacred and undermine society, the Weberian transcendent modality highlights the possibility that religion may co-exist with a 'secular' realm. Indeed, the transcendent sacred is operationalized through a 'lifting' of people and their experiences out of existing social identities and bonds, predicated upon an emergent individualism in which ultimate religious meaning is found above and beyond the 'immanent' ethnic or cultural loyalties of social communities. This conception of the transcendent sacred contrasts with that of the socio-religious sacred; there is no sense that it is 'diffused' and naturalized into the bodies of all through collective symbols and mythologies. It characteristically gives rise to new forms of collectivity, but these are associational and actively chosen rather than emergent from or expressive of immanent bonds.

The 'reaching beyond' the boundaries and limitations of the secular central to the transcendent sacred is key to how it imparts directionality to society. As Niklas Luhmann (2000, 77) suggests, the contribution of religion informed by this modality to the development of complex social systems rests on its capacity to "call out" individuals from their immanent lives, and to provide them with the space to judge society critically from the standpoint of an infinite, transcendent order. For Georg Simmel (1971, 173, 311, 362), this capacity simultaneously imparts a directionality to individuals, enabling them to reframe rather than negate secular experiences on the basis of an other-worldly source of personally authentic truth and to steer their lives in particular directions.

Weber's transcendent modality of the sacred can illuminate important features of a number of religions: David Martin, for example, notes the significance of polarizations of notions of the 'transcendent' and the 'immanent' in various major religions, while Charles Taylor utilizes these same polarizations in relation to Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism (Martin 2011, 43; Taylor 2007, 15, 18–19, 676). Both, however, note their particular significance in Christianity, though it is in its Protestant forms that this transcendent sacred is most significant, with studies of charismatic, Pentecostal, and evangelical Christianity across the world highlighting its continuing vitality.

Pentecostalism and the Transcendent Sacred

The evangelical emphasis on the individual freedom to respond to the call of God encourages an "opting out" of social "sacred canopies" and promotes reflexive engagements with social and political pluralism based upon transcendent considerations (Freston 2007, 224). This opting out also sometimes involves "leaping above" local communities, in contrast to the socio-religious sacred which involves the religious enframing of the collectivity, especially in the case of ethnic-minority Christians linking themselves to "evangelicalism as an expression of transnational modernity" (Martin 2005, 277). Indeed, it has been suggested that conversion in this context is not only a conversion to modern forms of these religions, but also to religious forms of modernity (Van der Veer 1996, 2–4). This is because conversion to a religion that incorporates within it a transcendent sacred can facilitate assimilation, on religious grounds, into contexts marked by modern patterns of differentiation, and modern valuations of mobility and voluntarism. The ambiguity here concerning whether Pentecostalism is a modern form of religion or a religious form of modernity can be explored further in relation to the notion of 'elective affinity.'

Just as Weber's (1991) and Troeltsch's (1976) discussions of Puritanism's 'elective affinity' with modern capitalism suggested an interactive and mutually constitutive relationship between religious culture and economic conditions, a number of analysts have indicated that Pentecostalism promotes practices uniquely well adapted to contemporary global conditions, but they are resistant to viewing it as "a mere reflex of the modern", arguing that it continues to exert an independent effect on capitalism's development (Robbins 2004, 137). Pentecostalism's success, on this view, rests on its capacities for crafting a mode of being that locates human action, feeling, and thought at an embodied intersection of constructions of worldly and other-worldly realities where traffic flows both ways. This is evident in a range of analyses that identify the astonishing growth of Pentecostalism in South Korea as an important factor in that country's modernization (e.g. Baldacchino 2012), and studies that identify the cultivation of Pentecostal orientations in 'mega-churches' as a method which utilizes 'commercialized' places of worship to facilitate a systematic cultivation of distance from prevailing, non-Christian cultural mores and practices (e.g. Maddox 2012). Here, the particular beliefs and practices of Protestantism (including hard work, honesty, and clean living) become the means through

which worldly economic activity is not only promoted but also infused with other-worldly significance via framing activities, experiences, and identities within the lens of Biblical interpretation and via constructions of the transformational agency of the Holy Spirit.

The Bio-Political Sacred

While the global vitality of Pentecostalism suggests the on-going utility of Weber's account of the transcendent sacred, his analysis of the 'elective affinity' between earlier Protestant forms and modern capitalism understood this as a historically and culturally contingent phenomenon emergent from a specific stage in the development of modern societies. Most critical commentators of Weber's work would agree that this stage has now been superseded by the radically disenchanting impetus of rationalized culture which controls and defines the secular realm so completely that society is removed from any link to religion, and where nothing is considered ultimate apart from the power and reach of this instrumentalist mode of governance and activity. Far from resulting in a complete disappearance of the sacred, however, the implications of Weber's (1968, 24–25, 1156; 1991) analyses suggest that the extension of technological culture itself constitutes an exceptionally powerful and prized incarnation of the extraordinary. In clarifying the nature and scope of this technologically informed bio-political modality of the sacred, Agamben has done most to explore and extend the implications of Weber's analysis.

Homo Sacer

Contrary to socio-religious and transcendent legitimations of worldly activity and being with reference to other-worldly authorities, Agamben (1998, 1, 3–12, 80) traces the origins of modern bio-political management to ancient Greece and archaic Roman law, focusing on the sacred as a category of juridico-political governance. Specifically, Agamben turns to the ambiguous figure of homo sacer within archaic law. Homo sacer, or 'sacred man,' is an exceptional and ambiguous figure not because of the potentially volatile energies Durkheim associated with effervescent gatherings of the collective, but because of a particular relationship to the law. Acquiring this status once legally condemned to exile, homo sacer is august because expulsion precludes the possibility of being sacrificed in

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accordance with divine law, but also accursed because of exclusion from the safeguards guaranteed by human law (and liable to be killed, with impunity) (Agamben 1998, 8, 73). Homo sacer thus becomes sacred by being placed in a space that is 'exceptional' relative to others in that removal from the auspices of both state authority and divine power reduces this figure to the status of 'bare life,' i.e., a basic, minimal, organic form of life set apart from collective representations of ways of living valued by the group.

In contrast to Foucault's exclusive association of bio-politics with the modern era, then, Agamben traces the sacralization of bare life back to those exceptional acts that occurred during the institution of political sovereignty—acts that signalled what might be called a type of secularization insofar as the sacred was cut adrift from religion and became expressive of sovereign power over individual bodies. What is different about modernity, however, is that rather than being an exception, this sovereign power over bodies has become the norm. We are all homines sacri now, with the sacred being foundational to the modern age through the state's "totalizing" power to manage embodied subjects on the basis of life and death via a somatic individuality in which the prized value of sustaining life as an object of management has been internalized through an obsession with 'health' and productivity (Agamben 1998, 111; Rose 2007).

Evidence for the pervasiveness and power of the bio-political sacred in contemporary society and its impact upon action and experience can be seen in various areas. In legal debates about euthanasia the notion of a 'life unworthy of being lived' reminds us of the state's power over 'bare' ('sacred') life, while technological interventions into the bodies of coma patients have facilitated new legal definitions of life, death or liminal states between these (Agamben 1998, 139, 186). Bare life has also been extended to research and policy initiatives ranging from the pursuit of control over the building blocks of human life via the human genome project, to the management of the unborn foetus (having reached a stage in the United States where pregnant women classified as having 'at risk' lifestyles can be incarcerated in order to safeguard future life). These and related initiatives involve weakening the boundaries between humans, machines, and rationalities of control that complement Heidegger's (1993) account of the technological 'enframing' of humans. For Heidegger, humans become positioned as a 'standing reserve' for technologically driven demands for efficiency within

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the 'immanent frame,' vacated by the transcendent sacred, and forced to yield their properties and potential to any efficiency-based demand placed upon them.

The Bio-Economic Sacred

Despite Durkheim's focus on the socio-religious sacred, his writings, like those of Weber, also allow us to identify a secular modality of the sacred wherein that which is deemed extraordinary is dislocated from any conception of society as religious and any notion that it is connected to a transcendent realm. This modality of the bio-economic sacred is not involved in the degree of control of people's actions associated with socio-religious or bio-political modalities, or representative of the other-worldly, religious characteristics of the transcendental sacred. Instead, it is grounded in the consumerization of the sacred in which there exists a proliferation of re-enchantment options available to individuals and groups within a broad, socially differentiated market.

Spirituality and the Fetishism of Commodities

This idea that the experience of the sacred can possess a this-worldly as well as an other-worldly character has been explored widely. Michel Maffesoli's (1996) analysis of the 'return of the sacred' as an emotionally constituted tribalism, for example, identifies the power of extraordinary experiences to shield people from modern disenchantment, without this effervescence being linked to institutional religion. In a contrasting but related discussion, Stjepan Meštrović's (1997) Postemotional Society is one of a range of studies that focus on an instrumentally rational manipulation of emotional experiences of the extraordinary for economic (as well as political) ends. Here, human feelings become 'post-emotional' through being enframed by commercial world-views that harness intimations of the extraordinary to a modality of the sacred that joins together human biological and neurological responses and economic instrumentalism.

Meštrović's concerns have been complemented by other explorations of how 'affective energy' is utilized within as well as outside consumer culture (Thrift 2004), identifying a secular, commercial exploitation of emotions stimulated by religious symbols (Gauchet 2002, 344–345; 1985). Drawing upon Marx's depiction of capitalism's "fetishism of commodities", Vásquez (2011) develops

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this argument about the commercial potentialities of the sacred by drawing attention to the material aspects of its incorporation into the cycle of production, circulation, and consumption of cultural goods. This is not the materialization of the socio-religious sacred outlined by Durkheim; it is aestheticization for gain. In this context, consumer products such as Coca-Cola and McDonalds become invested with transcendence, omnipotence, and omnipresence. Even capitalism itself is sacralized as "a this-worldly eschatology in which endless consumption is the mark of grace" (Chidester 2005, 34).

For Bryan Turner (2010), such developments highlight how the contemporary sacred has become 'hollowed out' via its incorporation into markets promoting multiple 'spiritualities' in books, the internet, TV, and elsewhere. Not only has it become clear that anything can be identified and experienced as sacred, but it is also the case that multi-national corporations spend increasing resources on market research seeking to identify and control the mechanisms implicated in people's affectual responses to signs and images of 'extraordinary' products in consumer culture. To the extent that governmental and market pressures are able to 'reach down' to control the physiological responses, feelings, and reflections of embodied subjects, there is here a dissemination of the sacred into the bodies of individual subjects very different from the naturalization evident in Durkheim's socio-religious sacred.

This analysis of the bio-economic sacred has particular implications for 'holistic' or 'New Age' forms of 'spirituality' that self-consciously mark themselves out from contemporary capitalism in pursuing what they perceive to be truths antithetical to it. Richard Fenn's (1978, 70–71) suggestion that these spiritualities have such weak other-worldly referents that they operate entirely harmoniously with the secular, differentiated imperatives of modern societies is supported by recent writings that reinforce the sense that these spiritualities are more part of, than set aside from, commercialism. This is because they enable individuals to consume cultural phenomena that may enable experiential transformations of various sorts, but only in forms and combinations facilitated by the market place. In this regard, New Age spirituality's acceptance of differentiation and consumerism may manifest what Philip Hammond (2000, 3–11) has called the 'extravasation' of the sacred though, contrary to his focus on this as a multidirectional process, it frequently involves rechanneling the

sacred in the direction of the economy (Gauchet 2002, 344–345). Here, religious traditions can be ransacked selectively with no expectation that they will be adopted as cosmological and practice-oriented wholes able to shape individuals' experiences in a comprehensive manner (Wood 2010, 277). Instead, New Age fashions reinforce the sense that there exists a bio-economic modality of the sacred in which commercial interests stimulate a "combination of somatic effects" in searching for economic advantage (Bennett 2001, 4–5).

Interactions of the Sacred

Exploring social theory's distinctive contribution to the study of religion, we have outlined how Weber and Durkheim offered contrasting frameworks for identifying and assessing phenomena experienced as sacred, and how their expressions might be socially and religiously significant today. Each modality of the sacred can be associated with the attempt to enframe bodily experiences in particular ways in order to impart directionality to social life, with significant implications for those questions concerning secularization and de-secularization prominent within sociology of religion. It is only by taking these modalities together, furthermore, that we can gain an understanding of the considerable potential of social theory for the study of such issues today.

In both socio-religious and transcendent modalities, the enframing of experience is centred on strongly polarized conceptions of the sacred and profane, wherein other-worldly sources of authority serve to steer worldly life, though with different consequences in terms of whether their cohabitation with the secular and with structural differentiation is likely to be marked by conflict or accommodation. The socio-religious sacred is opposed to any secularization insofar as this would interfere with its consecration of phenomena as sacred or as potential profanations of the sacred, and would open a sphere of existence in which experiences are cosmologically meaningless. The transcendent sacred is also opposed to wholesale secularization, but its equation of society with an immanent, this-worldly sphere that contrasts with an other-worldly realm presupposes and even valorises differentiation and at least a degree of social space characterised by non-religious phenomena.

Both socio-religious and transcendent modalities of the sacred, however, are associated closely with cosmologies that consecrate respectively society—or a realm that exists outside society—as religious. Bio-political and bio-economic modalities, in contrast, involve a weakening or collapse of the sacred/profane polarity and its links to institutional forms of religion, and a displacement of other-worldly legitimations of authority in favour of this-worldly political or economic foci. As such, these are suggestive of a secularization of the sacred manifest respectively as either a de-differentiating technologically driven bio-political materialization of the sacred as 'bare life,' or a bio-economic identity-based consumerism that fits comfortably into the wider patterns of differentiation affecting global societies.

These four modalities are ideal-types intended to outline possible relationships between the structural level of society and those meso-level feelings and experiences of the sacred that circulate outside the formal institutional spheres of modern states, but we have suggested it is possible to identify elements of them in the modern world. Not only is it the case that the major global religions exhibit elements of more than one of these modalities contemporarily as well as historically, however, it is also evident that global migration can encourage their intermingling and the development of novel interactions and combinations (Vásquez 2011; Orsi 1999). Similarly, broader patterns of globalization can facilitate varying degrees of accommodation or conflict between these modalities across diverse contexts.

We have indicated that Islam, for example, has many features suggestive of the socio-religious sacred, including the fact it allows no space for a differentiated sphere of the secular. This would indicate a marked antipathy to the secular modalities of the sacred that we have outlined, which is certainly evident in a number of contexts, and which is a common theme in contemporary assessments of Islam. Godazgar's (2007, 391, 407) study of consumerism in Iran, nonetheless, finds what we have called the bio-economic sacred to be as deeply embedded there as religion: even while Islamic authorities unequivocally condemn it and seek to eradicate it, global trends towards consumerism reinforced through the internet and (illegal) satellite television increasingly make Islam one part of a differentiated existence. Similarly, Gökariksel's (2009, 665) exploration of Muslim women's adoption of the veil in Turkey can be said to suggest a strong, socio-religious challenge to

the bio-economic sacred in modernity, but it is also of note that these women often take advantage of the specialist fashion outlets catering for the veiling market, introducing preference, choice, and consumer culture into their decisions.

Despite this intermingling, however, these modalities of the sacred indicate analytically distinct ways of enframing bodily experiences and cognitive systems of meaning, a range of implications in terms of their capacities for imparting directionality to a society, and divergent outcomes in terms of their consequences for religion in society more generally. This provides a useful context, moreover, for assessing the potentially partial character of some of the other social theoretical analytical models—touched on at the beginning of this chapter—that have been applied to questions of religion and society. We have already noted Luhmann's (2000) focus within his social systems theory on the capacity of religion to provide a critical standpoint on society, but we have located this specifically within a broadly Weberian transcendent modality of the sacred. The influential 'reflexive modernization' thesis of the 1990s (Giddens 1991)—wherein individualism becomes more prominent as religious traditions (and socio-cultural structures more broadly) dissolve into 'liquidity'—has a similar partiality. In this latter case, the analysis of religion (which is simply conflated with the 'sacred') is more reductive than Luhmann's account, signalling a thoroughgoing reflexive reconstruction of religion subject to individual life projects, but offering an analogous presentation of it as a set of cognitive resources for individuals in the broader context of secular modernity.

Margaret Archer's (2012) recent focus on the increased importance of individual reflexivity in the context of rapid social change—wherein religion, along with other social and cultural forms, faces mutually reinforcing cultural and socio-structural changes that continually confront individuals with novel circumstances, necessitating internal conversations about alternative courses of action—is rather different. There is for Archer no one course mapped out for the development of global societies, only a set of circumstances wherein different traditions, cultural resources, experiences, and values must interact with each other and adapt to accelerating patterns of change. In these circumstances, the 'problems' of order and of meaning central to classical social theory take on a more complex character, but the foregoing discussion suggests the continued relevance and utility of interrogating the evolving demarcation of the religious and the secular within analytically distinct

modalities of the sacred. These modalities may seek to shape and steer social action in contexts that are marked by increasingly diverse patterns of interaction, reflexivity, and change, but they alert us to the continuing significance of variable, religious and secular, forms, and experiences of the sacred, and their divergent impacts upon social life. As such, they also suggest the on-going utility of social theory's distinctive contribution to the study of religion and society.

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Recommended Reading

Beckford, James A. 2003. Social Theory and Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This is a comprehensive discussion and assessment of how a broad range of social theoretical perspectives have shaped the contemporary study of religion, with a focus on how these contribute to a social-constructionist account of religion.

Levine, Donald. 1995. Visions of the Sociological Tradition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

This is an authoritative account of the diverse philosophical traditions that have contributed to the development of the sociological tradition and of their complex inter-relations across the last two centuries.

Mellor, Philip A. and Shilling, Chris. 2014. Sociology of the Sacred: Religion. London: Sage.

This is a systematic and comprehensive *account of the evolving nature of the concept of the 'sacred'* in social theory and its contemporary implications for making sense of a range of religious and non-religious phenomena.

Nisbet, Robert. 1993. The Sociological Tradition. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

This is a highly influential discussion of the interaction of Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment philosophical influences on the development of sociology, most notably with regard to the focus on the sac*red as one of sociology's 'unit*-ideas,*' a focus that places the study of religion at the heart of* sociology and social theory.

Turner, Bryan S. 1991. Religion and Social Theory. London: Sage.

This was the first book-length study that addressed the key role of the body in social theories of religion, specifically with regard to the governmental regulation of bodies relative to problems of order.

Glossary

Bio-economic sacred

A conception and experience of extraordinary forces involving the consumerization of non-religious and—insofar as they retain some other-worldly relational referents—religious forms, within a market of lifestyle options that appeal directly to the biologically grounded, yet commercially shaped, emotions of individuals.

Bio-political sacred

A conception and experience of extraordinary forces involving the scope and power of the technological domination of science in the management of life.

Enframing

The capacity of a modality of the sacred (or faith, economic system, technological arrangement, or set of customs and ritual practices) to structure the meaning and significance of human experience.

Other-worldly

Social constructions of a supernatural or theological character, which are taken to characterize religious rather than secular constructions of the sacred. The term has primarily a relational, rather than ontological or metaphysical, character.

Problem of order

The classical philosophical and sociological concern for questions of how social and cultural orders could operate in modern contexts characterized by the decline of notions of divine order, embracing

issues of group formation, meaning making, and a range of rational and non-rational processes related to the internalization of collective norms.

Reflexivity

The capacity of individuals to treat their thoughts, feelings, and identities as objects that can be deliberated on through the medium of 'internal conversations'. Reflexivity is inherently temporal, involving a time delay between thinking and feeling, on the one hand, and cogitating upon those thoughts and feelings, on the other.

Sacred

The conception and experience of certain relationally constructed phenomena as 'extraordinary' relative to mundane life, and which come to enframe, shape, and direct social life and action in specific ways—some of which may be called 'religious' and some of which may not.

Social differentiation

The process where social life is divided into semi-autonomous spheres with their own character and rationale, and is used here to signal broad differentiations between phenomena deemed 'secular' or 'religious', and further differentiations of the social covering phenomena such as law, commerce, education and so on, which may be construed as having complete, relative or no autonomy from these broader differentiations.

Socio-religious sacred

A conception and experience of extraordinary forces constructed and maintained through an other-worldly cosmology and practices that sanctify society as religious.

Social theory

The systematic analysis and explanation of social phenomena focused upon the significance of supra-individual processes for patterns of human interdependence spanning across local groups, societies, nations and the globe.

Transcendent Sacred

A conception and experience of extraordinary forces constructed and maintained in supernatural terms and deemed to be distinct from the organic or 'immanent' processes that constitute social life.