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## Mystical Jewish Sociology

### Abstract:

*The paper begins by engaging Mircea Eliade's undervaluation of the importance of classical sociology of religion, namely, Durkheim and Weber, and goes on to show how much they share with him, particularly with regard to a critique of modern European civilization, and of the foundational importance of religion in society. This "other", non-positivist, non-reductionist face of Durkheim and Weber is elaborated by showing their religious, even "primordial" approaches to the religious bases of society and culture. Eliade's criticism of sociology is further misplaced, given the decline of the sociological regime of knowledge, and the accuracy of Eliade's prescient expectation of a cosmic rather than historical orientation, and the current importance of religion and "spirituality" for socio-cultural life, generally. The displacement of secular social theory by social and psychological understanding explicitly based in religious thought is explored in several domains and religious traditions. The paper emphasizes, however, a sociology created from within the streams of Jewish mysticism, and examples are offered. The line of Romanian scholars of religion, including Eliade, Idel and Culiano, is seen as less than apparently dissonant with both the sociology of religious experience, and the post-sociological turn to creating social theory from within religious, and particularly, mystical traditions.*

### Introduction

For a sociologist, and especially for one with a religious interest such as myself, it is always a challenge to write about the work of scholars in religious studies - like Mircea Eliade, Moshe Idel, and Ioan Petru Culianu. The problem is that, no matter how interesting these authors may sound, they were sometimes distrustful of sociologists, and their perceived tendency to reductionism and to a denial of the phenomenology of religious experience.

Eliade makes no bones about his distaste for sociologists working on religious questions, even while endorsing a scholarly pluralism, which Idel (2005) elaborates and modifies, as a perspectivism, in religious and Jewish studies, particularly.

The confusion, writes Eliade (1969;19), starts when *only* one aspect of religious life is accepted as primary and meaningful, and other aspects or func-

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tions are regarded as secondary or even illusory. Such a reductionist method was applied by Durkheim and other sociologists of religion.

Indeed, Durkheim's chef d'oeuvre is not even worthy of membership in the suspect category of sociology of religion. Eliade (1969; 15) observes: "Though Durkheim identified religion with society, *Les Formes Elementaires* does not, properly speaking, represent a contribution to the sociology of religion."

Max Weber is mentioned as "parallel to Durkheim's influence, but limited at the beginning to Germany....," with only a later deferred influence elsewhere, though the substance of his work is not described in this context, where Eliade analyzes "sociological approaches to religion."

At the same time, Eliade himself (1960) offers many sociological insights about religion, not the least of which is to suggest that the cultural specificity of the contemporary European "passion" for "historiography," for an historical, non-religious consciousness which privileges history over being and embraces nihilism, rather than a "new humanism." The road to renewal and the transcendence of historicist nihilism is through a scholarly-based, experiential awareness that the hegemony of this European culture is itself historical, and that its passion is passing, in favor of a broader, more primordial "otherness" that heralds a profound cultural and social transformation.

European values, observes Eliade (1960; 232) will lose their privileged status as universally recognized norms: they will be back at the status of local spiritual creations; that is, of cultural tributaries of a certain historic amplitude, conditioned by clearly circumscribed traditions.

Moreover, and perhaps even more radically, Eliade suggests that the end of the non-sacred historiographic culture of European nihilism, which is, in Durkheimian language, a "social fact," has further implications for the terms of intellectual problem formation, for knowledge itself. The re-appearance of exotic others, and the encounter of the "Western consciousness" with such difference (1960; 10) "...may even lead to a renewal of the problematics of philosophy, just as the discovery of exotic and primitive arts half a century ago opened up new perspectives to the European world of art."

A socio-cultural change induces a reformulation in the basic assumptions of knowledge, moving, against the grain of historical secularism, toward a re-sacralization, a return to religious symbolism and to the cosmic, which, even beyond the cultural and paradigmatic change, means also a change in life, and a resurgence of being (Eliade, 1960; 244). "But there is something more: there is this strange and reassuring fact that the change of spiritual perspective takes effect as a profound regeneration of our intimate being."

Eliade was mistaken, however, I think, to give such short shrift to the sociology of religion giants, Durkheim and Weber. They represented in their own work the very conflict - the antinomy between the Western, European consciousness of history, secularity and naive social science on the one hand, and on the other, the quest for the archaic, for the other, and for transcendently inspired meaningful, religious experiences of being - which he articulated.

Eliade was right, I think, to herald the deep cultural change toward the cosmic, as well as to signal its implications for the more formalized aspects of culture, in philosophy and art. He need not have troubled to dismiss these sociologists so readily, however, since the culturally emergent re-sacralization, the primordial, the other, the transcendental, has surfaced even further since the time in which he wrote, and in which it was also an incipient, ambivalent theme in the foundational sociologies of religion of

Durkheim and Weber.

In sum, sociology of religion has something to say about religious experience, but the practical, collective return to the experience of cosmic being has also brought with it the end of the sociological regime of knowledge. The question that now emerges is not whether it is possible only to do religious studies phenomenologically, honoring religion, but whether, now, in the time after historicism, it is also possible to do sociology, religiously.

## Sociology of Religion

Despite the venerable lineage of sociology of religion, from general sociology's founding figures, a recent reviewer of the current situation (Beckford, 2003; 155; 165) observes "social theory's neglect of religion," adding that "it is mainly the decline or absence of religion that is of interest to social theory these days." This is particularly odd and interesting from an empirical vantage-point, since the evidence (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Forman, 2004; Wuthnow, 1998) is persuasive of a religious turn, in what Eliade might have called "western" culture. Of course, this is the turn to what Luckman (1967) early on identified as the "invisible religion:" an individualized, interiorized quest for meaning and being, both, varieties of which are now expressed under the umbrella-like rubric of "the new age." This apparent cultural revitalization of religion as "*spirituality*" might of course be criticized as an extension of commodity capitalism (Carrette and King, 2005), or as Weber (1946) described earlier twentieth century new religio-political movements, as an "ersatz prophecy."

New age avatars, and their analysts, neglect the sociological interest in religion and the centrality not only of religious ideas, but of religious experience, in the social theoretic foundational works of Durkheim and Weber. If religious studies scholars are wary of classical sociology of religion, new age researchers omit it. Yet, both Durkheim and Weber share Eliade's commitment to the determinative primacy of religion, for culture, for intellectual formulation, and for what he referred to as "intimate being."

Durkheim, for example, rather than reducing religious phenomena to a positivist sociology, takes precisely the opposite position, asserting that religion is the basis for all other social phenomena.

This year (Durkheim writes in the *Année Sociologique* of 1899) as well as last, our analyses are headed by those concerning the sociology of religion. The according of the first rank to this sort of phenomenon has produced some astonishment, but it is these phenomena which are the germ from which all others – or at least all others- are derived. Religion contains within itself from the very beginning, even if in indistinct state, all the elements which in dissociating themselves from it, articulating themselves, and combining with one another in a thousand ways, have given rise to the various manifestations of collective life. From myths and legends have issued forth science and poetry; from religious ornamentations and cult ceremonials have come the plastic arts; from ritual practice were born law and morals. One cannot understand our perception of the world, our philosophical conceptions of the soul, of immortality, of life, if one does not know the religious beliefs which are their *primordial forms* (emphasis added).

If Durkheim's primordialism of religious forms, as a basic assumption, sounds like

Eliade's archaic primordial model, when Eliade writes (1960; 232) that "It must not be forgotten that all these cultures have a religious structure," one can also then compare it to Weber's famous thesis about the religious palimpsest of capitalist, or indeed, modern, culture that he finds in Puritan Protestantism (1958; 27): "... the problem which is generally most difficult to grasp: the influence of certain religious ideas on the development of an economic spirit, or the *ethos* of an economic system. In this case, we are dealing with the connection of the spirit of economic life with the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism."

Furthermore, Weber asserts the causal priority of religion in relation not only to an economic ethos, but to all of the cultural domain, and to what we might today call identity or self (1958; 183): "The modern man is in general, even with the best will, unable to give religious ideas a significance for culture and national character which they deserve."

Weber, though more complexly and reluctantly than Durkheim, writes in the rhetoric of modern science, fearful, in the closing pages of his most famous empirical study that he might "bring us to the world of judgments of value and of faith." Yet, is his condemnation of European culture – he begins the putatively explanatory, but now classic, study of the religious basis of culture by locating himself, as "a product of modern European civilization" – any less severe than Eliade's?

Such is Weber's description of what Eliade merely calls nihilism (1958; 182): No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualist without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.'

Eliade underestimated the affinity in values and sensibilities between himself and the formative sociologists of religion, with regard both to the causal power of religion for culture, society and self, as well as in the critique of modern European culture and the hope for a return and renewal of a less "disenchanted" (Weber) and "warmer" (Durkheim) emergent alternative. These general theorists of society and religion are themselves, certainly partly to blame for any misapprehension of their scholarly and cultural-religious commitments. Weber's methodological essays are still taught today as arguments of value-neutrality in social science, and Durkheim's methodological statement is still cited as the cornerstone of positivist sociological methodology. Moreover, Durkheim is rightly claimed as the progenitor and most influential ancestor of mainstream American sociology, and particularly in its emphasis on the study of institutions and focus on the problematic of social solidarity – a problematic that has now returned as a central social question of "social cohesion" among the policy analysts of the European Union (Green, 2006). In religion, it is Durkheim's self-proclaimed institutionalism and insistence on the priority of ritualism and Weber's emphasis, which he carefully, but expressly, juxtaposed to Marx's monocausal materialism, on the socially causal power of religious ideas that remains the leading direction of their sociologies of religion.

Yet, their value commitments and inclinations brought them analytically to another general social analytic emphasis, and to a particular other face in the sociological analysis of religion. I have taken perhaps a radical interpretive position (Wexler,

2007) by claiming that both Durkheim and Weber, beyond their distinct emphases on religious ritual and religious ideas, respectively, shared the view that ecstatic experience of the sacred is the originary core foundation of the social. Less radically, in both their sociologies of religion, neither the institutional nor the ideational successfully displace the centrality of the category of “experience,” of a phenomenological approach to religion. For Durkheim, the importance of collective ritual assemblies in creating the shared conceptions of the collective conscience – which is not only moral or normative, but also cognitive and refers to the basic categories of understanding – is undeniably mediated by a certain “consciousness,” an experience, even “frenzy” of “communion” which in its emotional power generates the energy which is at the heart of social being (Durkheim, 1995; 424):

... what defines the sacred is that the sacred is added to the real...We have seen, in fact, that if collective life awakens religious thought when it rises to a certain intensity, that is so because it brings about a *state of effervescence* (emphasis added) that alters the conditions of psychic activity. The *vital energies* (emphasis added) become hyperexcited, the passions more intense, the sensations more powerful...

Weber’s sociology of religious experience is perhaps more complex, since there are multiple ways in which the relation between the social and the religiously ideational is mediated by experience. It should be remembered that Weber’s soteriological interest and the development of theodicies of meaning, like Durkheim’s collective ideas, is, in the first instance, a response to life in the here and now. (Weber, 1946:278):

Yet even after such a sublimation of orgy into sacrament has occurred, the fact remains, of course, that for the devout the sacred value, first and above all, has been a psychological state in the here and now.

The hope for salvation and the elaboration and, later, rationalization of the myths of redemption begin with the experience of suffering, and the dread of death. In addition, the determinative influence of religious ideas, different conceptions of the divine, does not directly move toward setting the terms of the secular habitus or ethos of rationalized conduct. Even if it did, “charisma,” a state of grace,” which is the “revolutionary force in history,” would burst in upon routine rationalism, however sporadically, as in Scholem’s (1971; 9) description of Jewish messianism. But the link between religious ideas and secular conduct is mediated by the sacred experience of the relation between the “devout” and “god.” Here, the modes of relation define the character of the experience of the sacred, and ultimately the “direction” of religious ethics. Specifically, the “possession of god” or “incarnation” where the “goal was self-deification” (1963; 158), splits its methods of salvific divine possession into reception, as a “vessel,” and into a “soteriological methodology” (p.159) of sanctification as an “instrument.” “Spiritual suffusion” by becoming a vessel leads to the contemplative, mystical “road to salvation,” while the instrumentalization of a transcendental god who cannot easily be possessed or incarnated, but whose grace can be attested by the “fashioning of a practical way of life” ( p.286), leads to asceticism. These split modalities of religious experience are the bases of the different modes of prophecy, which are exemplary and emissary types, that represent, respectively, mystical and ascetic “roads to salvation,” as different habituses, ways of life, religious states, or most directly, as different types of religious experience. The different types of experience and prophecy have an “elective affinity,” in Weber’s complexifying of causality, to different “conceptions of God.”

This ordinarily underestimated emphasis on religious experience in Durkheim



and Weber (for a brief corrective on Durkheim, see Rappaport, 1999:378) may be valuable in its own right, as a modification of institutionalism and idealism, respectively, as the mainstays of sociological interpretations of religion. Beyond the explanatory re-emphasis or “correction,” the experiential, phenomenological interest for both social theorists also underlines the social criticism which they share with Eliade, of modern, European culture, and of their desire also for a “new humanism,” for a practical socio-cultural alternative. This is an alternative re-grounded in the sacralization of everyday life. Along with Weber’s muted hopes for a renewal of prophetic religions that would be capable of working against the deadening “mechanical petrification” that is a result of the rationalized, secularized culture of Protestant asceticism, Durkheim’s hunger for a new sacred vitality is no less profound (1995:429):

In short, the former gods are growing old or dying, and others have not been born...It is life itself and not a dead past, that can produce a living cult. But that state of uncertainty and confused anxiety cannot last forever. A day will come when our societies once again will know hours of collective effervescence during which new ideals will again spring forth and new formulas emerge to guide humanity for a time. And when those hours have been lived through, men will spontaneously feel the need to relive them in thought from time to time - that is, to preserve their memory by means of celebrations that regularly recreate their fruits.

I want to suggest that Durkheim and Weber were deeply ambivalent moderns, attached to different, but also shared, visions of a sacred past, even of what Weber calls the “unity of the primitive image of the world.” They also harbor the same wish for a renewal of the sacred, which would offer social and cultural revitalization, against the background of the cold death of modern European societies. Their combined analytical and soteriological interest in sacred experience and in the religious basis of knowledge and culture can be seen as a precursor to a variety of contemporary quests for the re-sacralization of both society and knowledge. The irony, however, of the affinity of sociology’s intellectual ancestors to the current “new age” tendency, is that the emergent culture involves the supersession of sociology, or at least, a reversal in the relationship between sociology and the sacred, which would reposition sociology as a “collective representation” or “ethos” of renewed sacred experience. Following the sociologies of religion of Durkheim and Weber would mean, as Eliade suggested, that new problematics, and new concepts would emerge to represent the rediscovery of the varieties of “otherness.”

## Beyond the Regime of Sociological Knowledge

The de-legitimation of sociological knowledge began well before the nineteen sixties, with the application of sociology of knowledge approaches to sociology itself (Friedrich, 1970). From Mannheim (1936) to the Frankfurt School (1972) and in C. Wright Mills’ (1943) early research on the social backgrounds and sociological beliefs of American sociologists, the initial claims of sociological objectivity have been challenged by historical, social and cultural contextualization, as well as criticized for the pretense of objectivity, in the face of its socially-interested, “ideological” character (Blackburn, 1972).

With the multicultural, postmodern turn in sociology, the ideology critique which

had focused on Parsonian, American sociological theory (Gouldner, 1970) was supplemented by a call for recognition of the multiplicity of sociologies, for the repair of the exclusion of the sociologies of the colonized and the socially marginalized, and a return to a critical reassessment of the cultural particularities and limitations of the “classical” sociologists (Lemert, 1995). The “multi-plication” of sociologies, though a different strategy than Marxist or Frankfurt School critiques of ideology, de-essentialized sociological theory, and re-inserted its scientific face of cognitive autonomy back into history and a wider geographical and cultural social world. Sociology was itself a cultural expression, dependent on and variable with, different social locations in time and space. The postmodern challenge to normal science was to redirect at least some sociological attention to basic paradigmatic assumptions, and to interrogate both their social interest and broader cultural meaning. At the same time, the relativization of the sociological corpus led back to a re-examination of the roots of classical sociology. McCarthy (2003), for example, argued that sociology, unlike the other social sciences, has its basis, along with cumulated research, (p.2) in “... classical Greek assumptions about the nature of knowledge, community, virtue, political freedom and social justice.” In his view: “It was the American tradition, and especially the writings of Talcott Parsons, which later *repressed* (emphasis added) these origins in order to transform sociology into a utilitarian and positivist science of explanation, prediction and social control.” McCarthy aims to show that by virtue of their education and cultural-historical inclinations, the classical Europeans sociologists were “returning to the dreams of the ancients;” by which he means the “ancient Greeks,” and “the return to classical Greece.” He wants to argue that their thematic foci represented the social theories and commitments of ancient Greek culture and philosophy.

The recontextualization of sociology includes also positioning sociology in relation to religion, although not as its super-ordinate observer. On the contrary, Vidich and Lyman (1985) try to show for the origins of American, rather than European, sociology, the extent to which the intellectual interests and paradigmatic assumptions of the founders of American sociology, as well as contemporary sociology, reflect their origins in and commitments to the religious beliefs of American Protestantism (1985:1):

“But in the early decades of the twentieth century, American sociology began to separate itself from its most visible religious orientations. Substituting sociodicy – a vindication of the ways of society to man – for the theodicy that had originally inspired them, American sociologists retained the original spirit of Protestant world salvation. They substituted a language of science for the rhetoric of religion.”

The dissolution of sociology into its cultural, historical-philosophical and religious meanings belongs, as I have tried to show (Wexler, 2000), to a broad set of societal changes. Along with a plethora of “new social movements” or “revitalization movements,” some of which are now analyzed as a “new age,” (Heelas, 1996) or as a “spiritual revolution,” the de-legitimation of an objective, hegemonic sociology, opens the door to the revival of ancient traditions of social interpretation, and of the elaboration of new conceptions – which as Durkheim and Weber showed, for their time – that are rooted in the conduct and meaning of everyday social life.

The question which I posed in *Mystical Society* (2000) was whether this altered social life also encourages an altered social hermeneutic and the development of new concepts for social understanding appropriate to a different era. If indeed, part of the new social era is a “new age,” including the revival of ancient traditions, where questions of the sacred, and especially of mysticism, now coded as “spirituality,” return to

center-stage, after their long, modern marginalizing secularization, does this not also mean a reversal in the relation between sociology and religion?

## Mystical Jewish Sociology

To the extent that *Mystical Society* is read, either in its English or Hebrew versions, it is most often cited as a sociological explanation for the rise of a mystical society, and as articulating the social bases of contemporary spirituality and the new age. My intent was to show and to summarize the arguments of others, from models of revitalization movements to theories of the information society, about why there is indeed a current return to the sacred in society, as mysticism, spiritualism and new age cultures. This socio-cultural return, however, was intended merely to provide a backdrop for a different project, which is a continuation of the decline of the regime of sociological knowledge, and an affirmation of classical and contemporary analyses of the origins of the categories of social understanding – including, significantly, sociology itself – in religious life, in the reality of the sacred, and in the experiences and conceptions of ancient religions, and especially, mystical traditions. The project then, and now, is not to offer a sociological explanation of the historical appearance of the mystical society and the return of mystical religious practices from the socio-historical margins. The project is to show, continuing the view of both Durkheim and Weber, that socio-cultural knowledge has its basis in religious traditions, at the core of which is religious experience. The goal is not to create a mystical society and culture, which I submit again, already now exists, but to construct from there, a mystical sociology. In *Mystical Society* (2000; 1), I wrote:

Unlike postmodernism, the new society is not about the power of signs and the pervasiveness of cultural representations. Nor is it about the de-centering of the person or the dispersion of meaning. Rather, it's about being and experience, bodiliness and transcendence, and access to very old traditions of religious interpretations as successors to the current hegemony of social scientific languages in the academy and the diluted versions of those in mass culture.

About these languages, I wrote (p. 2):

We start to move away from familiar concepts: from self and socialization to talk of immortality as permanent transformation or 'reselfing;' from culture to being; from society to practices of revitalization; from social theory to cosmicization...

If the wished for "return" of classical sociology, and its religious studies critics, has already occurred, we should already been doing social analysis religiously; and if the "return" is a mystical and spiritual one, then doing it mystically and spiritually, albeit in a more rationalized, transposed, academic disciplinary context.

I tried to rethink several basic categories of sociology – the self, social criticism, society, education and sociology of education, and social interaction, through the lens of mystical traditions, on a platform of sacred knowledge. While I acknowledge that this was a preliminary attempt, it was also a pluralistic one, drawing "mysticism" from diverse sources, including native America religions, William James' psychologized American Protestantism, Hindu Tantrism, and Hasidism, drawing heavily from secondary sources, and including there, the work of Eliade, Idel and Culianu.

The construction of a mystical sociology, one which is both conceptually sensitive



to the current socio-historical context, but rooted in traditions of sacred knowledge, is an enormous task, and invites and overwhelms the mere sociologist to swim in the not always calm waters of comparative religious studies. Dilettantism is probably worse than reductionism. Without surrendering my view that “new age” cultural assumptions ought to be deeply deconstructed into the ancient core religious traditions from which they perform their bricolage, and without surrendering my own interests in other traditions, such as Taoism and Yoga, in recent years, I have become more a student of the varieties of Jewish mysticism, in particular, in order to deepen, by particularization, the project of creating a mystical – now, Jewish – sociology.

This does not deny that there are already elements of a meeting between aspects of Jewish mysticism and sociology. More than twenty five years ago, Stephen Sharot (1982), offered elements and insights of a sociology of Jewish mysticism within his analysis of historic Jewish social movements. He described a number of dimensions of mystical social movements (p. 14), and summarized the perspectives that are taken with regard to such a social analysis. His own preference, and application, in my view, is for a Weberian sociology of religion approach to Jewish mysticism, through an emphasis on Weber’s theory of charisma and routinization, as well as other aspects of Weber’s sociology of mysticism (p. 158), which Sharot applies to an analysis of Hasidism. Sharot’s assertion of the paucity of work in the field remains still largely true (1982;20): “There are many anthropological and sociological studies of millennial movements, but very little attention has been given to the social contexts of mysticism.” A recent attempt to bring an anthropological perspective to bear on the study of Jewish mystical texts is different from Sharot’s sociology of Jewish mystical social movements as its object, and also draws, in its emphasis on the analysis of ritual, from the Durkheimian, rather than Weberian tradition of sociological analyses of religion (Bloom, 2007). Within anthropology, Yoram Bilu has produced a continuous stream of important anthropological studies of contemporary, Jewish mystical phenomena (Bilu, 2007) and Yonatan Garb (2005) has brought sociological insights to bear on the connection between classical and contemporary Jewish mysticism.

This is the meeting of social science broadly, and sociology and anthropology particularly, which takes Jewish mysticism as its object of study. These valuable studies are drawn from the conceptual resources of modern social science, that were created, I would argue, before the crisis of the generative culture of modernity, and its social processes of rationalization, secularization and individualization. There remains an enormous amount of theoretical and empirical work to be done in order to build a sociology of Jewish mysticism; both in the objects of study in the huge historical and contemporary array of the varieties of phenomena under the catch-all category of “Jewish mysticism;” and in the bringing to bear of conceptual resources from general sociology and sociology of religion and applying them to the elucidation of these phenomena.

But, that is not the reversal of the relation between sociology and religion to which I have been referring, and which I suggest is part of a larger socio-historical transformation in the deconstruction of sociology, and part of a broad re-sacralization process generally; and a re-sacralization of social interpretation, particularly. This aspect of the rich and complex interaction between sociology and the traditions and phenomena of “Jewish mysticism” is a “mystical Jewish sociology.”

This reversal, I should note, is not limited to the application of concepts drawn from within the traditions of Jewish mysticism to social phenomena. The re-sacralization, as I indicated in *Mystical Society*, brings to the fore a variety of mystical traditions,

and, their development as new analytics, and is not limited to conventional sociology, or, even, to the social field. Robert Hattam (2004) tries to draw the implications of one stream of Buddhism for rethinking critical social theory. Eleanor Rosch (2002), working from within Buddhism, also, in a centenary commentary on the American psychologist and mystic, William James, offers a specified analytic alternative to mainstream cognitive psychology. As Rosch makes the connection between James, Buddhism and psychology (2002; 37): “Within *The Varieties of Religious Experience* lies the germ of a truly radical idea. It is that religious experience has something important and basic to contribute to the science of psychology. Yet, now, a hundred years after the publication of James’s monumental work, the mainstream academic fields of psychology are no closer to considering let alone implementing this idea than they were in James’s day. Why?”

Rosch supplies an answer (p. 37): “Once we have divided the world into natural and supernatural (note that these are our own conceptual categories) and have defined religion as being about the latter, the *direction of causal analysis* (emphasis added) in naturalistic science can flow in only one direction – from psychology and cognitive science to religious beliefs and feelings.” Rosch, after specifying what this would mean in the analysis of a number of psychological phenomena, goes on to conclude (2002; 54):

“The study of religious experience has been too long the ostracized stepchild of psychology. Now on the centennial of the publication of James’s classic work, it is time to rehabilitate his quest and *take religious experience seriously* (emphasis added) (anathema as that may be in secular academia). The study of religion, through the medium of contemplative and meditative awareness, can contribute, in quite specific terms, to cognitive science and clinical practice as they are presently done. Beyond that, this kind of study offers a radical new paradigm and mode of investigation, for it calls into question the accepted understanding of the person or self, both as the subject of investigation and as the investigator.”

Recently (Wexler, 2007), I have tried to offer a specifically Jewish, extended example of a mystical sociology, by working through an analysis of social interaction that is drawn from practical models of social interaction in Habad Hasidism. The analysis, however, draws from kabbalistic ideas, images and metaphors, on the one hand, and, on the other, I attempt to reinsert the sacrally-derived categories into social history, and to suggest that they are part of an historical process of societal reintegration. In this sense, the analysis works back and forth, across the borders of sociology and religion, since the reintegration idea draws on theories of social movements, and I suggest further that the exemplary sacred practices may also be re-secularized, historically, constituting a dialectic of the elementary forms of social interaction; or, the elementary forms of mystical sociality.

In *Mystical Interactions* (2007), I construct the categories of aura, cosmos and energy, as both successors to the conventional sociological categories, derived from classical sociology, of self, culture and society, and as descriptions of relational processes. In a typological abbreviation (p.90), I indicated: “Concretely, and with especial reference to Jewish mysticism, aura works particularly in the domains of mystical prayer, cosmos is accomplished in Torah study, and energy is a focal point in meditative, mystical types of prophecy.”

I try to show not only that categories derived from examples of Jewish mysticism, from “practical conduct” can make sense of sacralized social interaction, in an altered social context, but also that they offer general analytical resources for a theory of social interaction. Moreover, that is not a formal theory of interaction, but an historical one, suggesting the dynamic role of the practice and theory of sacralized social interaction

in the re-integrative social processes that supersede the disintegration of society - which is a central focus of modern, classical sociological analyses. (Wexler, 2007; 90): "... there is also an oscillation between sacralization and secularization. Prayer, study and prophecy may be secularized, and their secular version may also then be re-sacralized. The sacred and mystical sociality that I have been describing is part of the wider process of social reintegration..." I concluded that section with the observation that this is another element in the larger project of creating a mystical Jewish sociology (p. 94): "... toward articulating a mystical sociology that more adequately re-sublimates theoretically, the deep changes in interaction and integration, which are actually occurring in the social present."

Sociological theory turns out, at least intellectually, to be neither reductionist nor imperialist, but a willing potential dialogical partner for religious studies generally, and Jewish studies, in particular. What this will mean beyond re-conceptualization, for what Eliade referred to as "intimate being," will require a discussion of not only the ideas of sociology, but also of its practice. After all, mystical intellection, as Moshe Idel (1998; 2002) reminded us, is a practical, embodied, pneumatic hermeneutic.

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