

Max Weber died on June 4 in 1920 in Munich from a lung infection. While his stature in western sociology has not been in question, his influence has unsurprisingly waxed and waned through the twentieth century. However, given the current crises in the Middle East and beyond that illustrate a range of tensions between the religious and the political, the relevance of his sociology in general and his sociology of religion in particular cannot be in doubt. In this regard one can think not just of the major works on China and India, but also of the poignant two lectures on science as a vocation and politics as a vocation that he delivered in Munich in January 1919. In the politics lecture, Weber explored many of the moral dilemmas behind politics and religion or more specifically between the role of violence in politics and the place of brotherly love in religious traditions. In various ways the articles in this special collection are concerned with this tension between the two spheres of social life (or political institutions and the practice of religion) which are explored here in terms of the 'world religions'.

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