

MAX WEBER

**The Protestant Ethic
and the Spirit of
Capitalism**

*Translated by
Talcott Parsons*

**Introduction by
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CONTENTS

Translator's Preface	v
Introduction by Randall Collins	vii
Max Weber's Introduction to the Sociology of Religion	13*

THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

**Part I:
The Problem**

Chapter I.	
Religious Affiliation and Social Stratification	35
Chapter II.	
The Spirit of Capitalism	47
Chapter III.	
Luther's Conception of the Calling	
Task of the Investigation	79

**Part II:
The Practical Ethics of the
Ascetic Branches of Protestantism**

Chapter IV.	
The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism	95
A. Calvinism	98
B. Pietism	128
C. Methodism	139
D. The Baptist Sects	144
Chapter V.	
Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism	155
Notes	185
Index	285

*In order to consistently reproduce the translator's original pagination, the text of the translation begins on page 13.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Talcott Parsons (1930)

Max Weber's essay, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, which is here translated, was first published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Volumes XX and XXI, for 1904-5. It was reprinted in 1920 as the first study in the ambitious series *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, which was left unfinished by Weber's untimely death in that same year. For the new printing he made considerable changes, and appended both new material and replies to criticism in footnotes. The translation has, however, been made directly from this last edition. Though the volume of footnotes is excessively large, so as to form a serious detriment to the reader's enjoyment, it has not seemed advisable either to omit any of them or attempt to incorporate them into the text. As it stands it shows most plainly how the problem has grown in Weber's own mind, and it would be a pity to destroy that for the sake of artistic perfection. A careful perusal of his notes is, however, especially recommended to the reader, since a great deal of important material is contained in them. The fact that they are printed separately from the main text should not be allowed to hinder their use. The translation is, as far as possible, faithful to the text, rather than attempting to achieve any more than ordinary, clear English style. Nothing has been altered, and only a few comments to clarify obscure points and to refer the reader to related parts of Weber's work have been added.

The Introduction, which is placed before the main essay, was written by Weber in 1920 for the whole series on the Sociology of Religion. It has been included in this translation because it gives some of the general background of ideas and problems into which Weber himself meant this particular study to fit. That has seemed particularly desirable since, in the voluminous discussion which has grown up in Germany around Weber's essay, a great deal of misplaced criticism has been due to the failure properly to appreciate the scope and limitations of the study. While it is impossible to appreciate that fully without a thorough study of Weber's sociologi-

cal work as a whole, this brief introduction should suffice to prevent a great deal of misunderstanding.

The series of which this essay forms a part was, as has been said, left unfinished at Weber's death. The first volume only had been prepared for the press by his own hand. Besides the parts translated here, it contains a short, closely related study, *Die protestantischen Sekten und der Geist des Kapitalismus*; a general introduction to the further studies of particular religions which as a whole he called *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen*; and a long study of Confucianism and Taoism. The second and third volumes, which were published after his death, without the thorough revision which he had contemplated, contain studies of Hinduism and Buddhism and Ancient Judaism. In addition he had done work on other studies, notably of Islam, Early Christianity, and Talmudic Judaism, which were not yet in a condition fit for publication in any form. Nevertheless, enough of the whole series has been preserved to show something of the extraordinary breadth and depth of Weber's grasp of cultural problems. What is here presented to English-speaking readers is only a fragment, but it is a fragment which is in many ways of central significance for Weber's philosophy of history, as well as being of very great and very general interest for the thesis it advances to explain some of the most important aspects of modern culture.

Talcott Parsons
Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.
January 1930

INTRODUCTION

Randall Collins

A classic is a book one can read over and over. How is this possible without becoming bored? A classic has depth, echoes that resonate, such that each reading gives something new. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is not as dense with ideas as some of Weber's other works, such as his encyclopedic *Economy and Society*, parts of which I have read at least ten times but always with the question "Have I actually read this before?" *The Protestant Ethic* is Weber's best-written and most accessible book, which is one reason for its popularity. Another reason is its layers of significance. It has something to appeal to the introductory sociology student and also to sophisticates sifting the most refined theoretical and meta-theoretical issues. Here one finds Weber as a modernist, or postmodernist if you like; as a conflict theorist or functionalist; as a cultural interpreter but also analyst of rationality.

The Protestant Ethic reaches the ultimate mark of success: people know about it who have never read it. In the world of educated people, everyone knows (or thinks they know) "the Weber thesis." Such success depends, at one level, upon crystalizing the argument into a few key phrases. Every word in the title conveys what Weber wanted to get across: the Protestant has an "ethic," and "capitalism" has a "spirit"; and the second pair flows from the first pair. The phrases epitomize the intellectual struggle that helped make the argument famous: that Weber turned Marx on his head, making "materialism" depend upon ideas and culture, i.e. on "ethic" and "spirit." The words have acquired a life of their own; now one hears sportscasters talk about an athlete having "the work ethic," probably without ever knowing who Max Weber was.

Very few works of social science reach this outermost popular level. (The nearest example in the late 20th century is probably Thomas Kuhn's terms "paradigm" and "paradigm revolution," which circulate among people who may never have read his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.) In a great classic, the outer layers lead to the inner layers. Weber's "spirit of capitalism" reminds a sociologist of his famous distinction between "tradi-

tional" and "rational" capitalism, the latter summed up in his memorable line about the "iron cage" in which modern people live. If one has an eye for it, one can find Weber's craftsmanship throughout in the writing, such as the deft way he pays deference to historical specialists while going on to assert his right to make general statements, as an outsider, which cut across the turf-lines of their fields. One could take *The Protestant Ethic* as a writing manual for a scholarly best seller.

The Argument of the Protestant Ethic

Weber sets up his argument by noting that in modern times Protestants are more likely to be businessmen, as well as skilled workers, than are Catholics. (The sexist language is intentional; Weber was writing about an historical time when societies were male-dominated.) His evidence comes from Germany around 1900, which raises the question: why should effects linger this long from an historical event, the Protestant Reformation, which began around 1520? In fact, the effects have lingered and spread well beyond Weber's Germany. The United States of America, which began as a Puritan settlement, was, even in Weber's day, the most capitalist society in the world. Research since then has shown a similar pattern, up to a point: American Protestants dominated business and the skilled working-class trades until about 1960. After that, however, Catholics caught up with American Protestants and even overtook them in the higher occupations.

Does this mean that the effects of Protestantism on capitalist business were mistaken, or does it mean that the Protestant Ethic has finally dissipated in modern or, as some say, "postmodern" America? Before jumping to either conclusion, we might note that Protestantism has been spreading rapidly in recent decades in Latin America, as traditional Catholics have been converting to Protestant sects. This religious movement has gone along with a takeoff of capitalism in Latin America, and it is just those converts to Protestantism who are leading the drive to expand small business. It looks as if the Protestant Ethic and the growth of capitalism are being played out yet again on another terrain.

Assuming there is a connection between Protestantism and capitalism, how can it be explained? Weber takes issue with a long-standing interpretation of the Protestant Reformation, which

regards it as a decline in the religiousness of the Middle Ages. Protestantism was not a move to secularization, but exactly the opposite, an increase in religious intensity. Protestantism was not a shift toward worldly enjoyment, which was already quite well advanced in the Catholic societies of the Renaissance. The importance of the Reformation, instead, was the impetus Protestantism gave to the combination of piety with business.

Now Weber introduces a crucial distinction. Capitalism was not invented by the Reformation; it existed in many societies throughout medieval and ancient history. There were merchants in ancient Greece, slave markets in Rome, all manner of business enterprise in China and India, merchant caravans in the Islamic world, and merchant guilds which dominated the cities of Italy, Germany, and the Low Countries in the Middle Ages. Capitalism was not lacking; what was lacking was a spirit of capitalism, and an organization of capitalism, distinctive to modern capitalism. Weber refers to the two kinds of capitalism as, on the one hand, "traditional" capitalism, and, on the other hand, modern or "rational" capitalism.

Traditional capitalists were certainly interested in making profits; but there was nothing about this that could be regarded as a social "ethic." The ideal was to acquire social position and, of course, the money to support it, but not to become bogged down in the struggle to make money. A comfortable aristocratic lifestyle was the goal, and business was carried out with an attitude of getting it over with as easily as possible. The most lucrative form of capitalist enterprise consisted of long-distance trade, preferably in luxury items on which a large profit could be made: spices from the Indies, silk from China, gold and jewels from the fabled mines the Spanish conquistadors sought in the Americas. Weber calls one version of this "politically oriented adventurers' capitalism" or "booty capitalism": a form of investment combining military and political expeditions with the expectation of making a business profit. Greek, Roman, and Islamic armies made money by capturing slaves; other armies established plantations or conquered trade routes. In the civilian version of "political adventurers' capitalism," prominent during the early modern period in France and other European states, an entrepreneur would buy up government offices in return for a split of their revenue; for instance, one could

become a "tax farmer," buying the right to collect taxes in return for a cut of the take.

Weber regards all these forms of "traditional" capitalism as sharp contrasts to "rationalized" modern capitalism. Rational capitalism is based not on luxury trades but on mass production of the commodities of everyday life. The medieval merchant sought to make a fortune out of a single cargo of jewels; the modern capitalist makes a far bigger fortune out of mass marketing humble commodities such as tires or toilet paper. Hence the traditional attitude, the greedy maximization of profit in a one-shot enterprise, has been overcome by a new attitude which relies upon the accumulation of many small gains. Not high prices and windfall profits, but moderate prices and high, steady sales are the driving force of modern capitalism. It is for this reason, incidentally, that Weber in his later works notes that modern capitalism is not driven by the industrial revolution and the invention of new technologies, but the other way around: mass-production technologies are of no use until there is a mass market for everyday goods. Such technology is pointless in the luxury trades. Modern machinery is the result of a prior revolution in the spirit of capitalism.

Weber finds evidence of the existence of this rational capitalist spirit in the writings of Benjamin Franklin during the 1730s and 40s. Franklin is famous in American folklore as an inventor, patriotic politician, writer, and printer. He was also a successful businessman, and his maxims exemplify the new attitude for doing business: "time is money," "a penny saved is a penny earned," "waste not want not," and so forth. The attitude is that hard work and saving one's money are not only a way of making more money, but an ethical obligation. Wasting time and frivolously spending money are wrong; although Franklin no longer put it in religious language, the carryover is unmistakable: it is a sin.

The religious impetus to rational capitalism emerged in several stages. The most extreme form was Calvinism, a doctrine which spread from Geneva, to the Netherlands, to England, and then came with the Puritans who settled New England in the 1620s. John Calvin, who led a religious uprising to take over the city of Geneva during the 1540s, formulated the extreme version with his doctrine of predestination. Calvinism is a branch of so-called "radical" Protestantism; there is also a milder form, which began

with Martin Luther, who started the original Protestant revolt against the Roman Catholic papacy in 1517. Weber's book thus traces several levels of the development of Protestantism: first Luther's conception of a calling; then Calvinism; finally, he cleans up the loose ends by dealing with some of the other "radical" Protestant sects, what he calls the "ascetic branches of Protestantism," such as the Pietists, Quakers, Methodists, and Baptists.

Luther's crucial contribution was to formulate the idea that work is a "calling." The term is familiar today among Protestant ministers. If a preacher receives a job offer to go to another church, it is referred to as "receiving a call," with the sense of "a call from Above." Luther originated the doctrine that every kind of work, every activity in the ordinary world, is a religiously sanctioned activity. A person is "called" to work in business, or as a laborer, or a farmer. Weber regards this as a key step in turning religious motivations in the direction of ordinary work, which would ultimately lead to the new spirit of capitalism. However, Luther was only the first, half-way step. Luther emphasized traditional social activities, including obedience to traditionally constituted state authority. Luther preached adjustment to the world. He was a social conservative. It was the ascetic sects, going beyond Luther, which harnessed religious motivation to change the world and thereby carried through the revolution in social attitudes.

The ascetic Protestants, in turn, divided into two branches. On one side were the Calvinists, whose key doctrinal point was predestination; on the other were the radical sects (Quakers, Baptists, etc.) who rejected life in the ordinary world entirely and tried to live like the community of early Christian Apostles. Weber regards these radical sects as somewhat tangential to his main argument, although he notes they had important social effects in their own right, including their influence upon American democracy. But his key interest focuses on the Calvinists, for they led the Puritan revolution in England during the 1640s, and it was an offshoot of this group which settled New England and imparted its spirit to American capitalism.

The Calvinist doctrine of predestination holds that God has already picked out who will be saved for Heaven and who will be punished in Hell. Weber argued that this belief must have given rise to a very strong anxiety, as believers wondered whether they

were in the category of the saved or the damned. The doctrine holds that we are all sinners, all equally worthy of damnation; our sins are so great that nothing we can do can make us worthy of salvation. Only God, of His own will, mercifully picks out the few who are elected to be saved. Hence doing good works—praying, going to church, repenting, giving to charity—count as nothing toward one's salvation. But there is one pathway which is psychologically comforting: to live a godly life in every respect, every moment of the day. If one does this, turning one's work into a calling, restricting any impulse to frivolous pleasure, one comes to experience a feeling of assurance that indeed one is a member of the Elect. The puritan, ascetic lifestyle thus emerges as a response to the doctrine of predestination. Its effects, in turn, are to bring worldly economic activity under religious control and to harness religious motivation to a new spirit of capitalism.

The doctrine of predestination is a set of ideas, and here Weber seems to be giving a very forceful example of how ideas can influence social history, rather than vice versa. It is possible for us to develop other interpretations of what Weber is showing. Weber is dealing with a time when religion was an omnipresent part of daily life. Preachers were the main source of news, education, and even entertainment; the church was the center of village life, and religious ceremonies marked the activities of urban guilds and of aristocratic households. In short, religion comprised not just ideas; it was *social practice*.

The political upheavals which took place during the Reformation broke apart the routine of daily living. Clergy allied with the aristocracy or with the state were replaced by a new type of privately ordained minister; cities became independent under new religious leaders; wars were fought; disbelievers were expelled or killed. The Reformation and the religious wars and revolutions, which continued through the 1500s and into the late 1600s, caused an upheaval in everyday life. Theological beliefs were not just an esoteric concern of church intellectuals, but matters widely discussed among ordinary people. Ideas became symbols of contrasting ways of life. Weber notes that ideas were so important at this time in history because they were closely connected with action; he avoids the question of which came first, ideas or action, insofar as both made up a coherent whole. (Robert Wuthnow's book, cited

in this volume's "Suggested Further Reading," gives a brilliant analysis of this complex of ideas and social practices at the time of the Reformation.)

The Calvinistic Puritans, above all, were leaders in the breakthrough to a new lifestyle. The significance of this breakthrough can be seen by contrasting it with the lifestyle and mode of belief that preceded it. Medieval Catholicism was by no means a lax religious system. Weber points out that it channeled religious energies into practices which flowed in a direction away from any possibility of changing worldly economic life. Catholicism emphasized the pursuit of salvation by "good works"; this meant all the things a good Christian could do in order to attain salvation. These included praying, confession, taking part in church ritual, giving charitable contributions to the poor and sick, making pilgrimages to holy places, and worshipping holy relics. Weber comments that the doctrine and practice of "good works" meant that a good Catholic had a kind of spiritual bank account: one acquired sins, but against these one could set off one's repentances and good works. Weber argues that this led to a cycle of sin and repentance, rather than a continuous motivation to make the world into a perfect godly place; it siphoned off the anxiety and the religious motivation, which the Calvinists managed to harness.

There is a second way in which medieval Catholicism siphoned off religious motivation. Christians were divided into two classes: a religious elite of monks and nuns, as compared to ordinary laity. The full-scale pressure to live a godly life was reserved for the monks and nuns, who withdrew from the world into monasteries, and applied themselves to the powerful asceticism of continuous prayer, bodily mortification, and spiritual discipline. Monks displaced the religious energy in a direction away from changing the world; hence it was crucial that Protestantism should eliminate monasteries. Martin Luther, who began as a Catholic monk, returned to the world and married. He became a Protestant minister, living among ordinary laity. By eliminating the monkhood, the level of religious motivation was spread from an elite to the entire population of believers. Without monasteries, henceforward every Protestant Christian had to live the disciplined life of a monk, but applied now to the daily activities of the ordinary world.

Weber has been sketching a causal chain across several links. First, medieval Catholic Christianity harnessed religious energy, but only for the monks and nuns. Second, Luther's Reformation, which abolished the monasteries, made ordinary occupations into religious "callings." Third, radical Calvinism, which turned up the pressure with the doctrine of predestination, made everyday life a constant drive for moral perfection. The economic effects of Calvinism were to set loose the spirit of rationalized capitalism: honest dealings in business, rather than greedy search for a maximal profit; reliable, steady production and sales, turning into a system of mass production; and continuous savings and reinvestment into further business growth.

This led to a fourth stage: the puritan capitalists began to grow rich. Continuous hard work, combined with ploughing back profits into business expansion, brought about business success. The earlier religious doctrines began to die out. Ben Franklin was no longer a Puritan or a Calvinist. The Americans of his day were turning to Deism, or to other rationalized doctrines which downplayed the supernatural. But the spirit lived on in a secularized form, in the utilitarianism and individualism which comes out in Franklin's worldly maxims, and continued to give an impetus to work, to save, to reinvest, to maintain self-control, and to keep striving for economic success. Modern capitalism took off; it no longer needed the religious motivation which had inspired it.

Was there a fifth stage? Weber implies that by his day, around 1900, even the echoes of religious belief had become superfluous. "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so." Like it or not, the momentum of capitalism carries us along with it; to keep from falling to the bottom of the class structure, we need to scramble for success. "Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history." Victorious capitalism no longer needs a religious impetus. Weber even comments that "In the field of its highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to be come associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually give it the character of sport" (quotations from pages 181-2).

Is Weber right about this? Have we outgrown religious capitalism entirely? The spread of capitalism around the world is far from dead. Recall the comment at the outset of this summary, that ascetic Protestant sects have been spreading in Latin America and elsewhere in the very places where the new round of capitalism has been growing. In America, the homeground of the most extreme forms both of the Protestant Ethic and of modern capitalism, religious revivals have taken place periodically, including the most recent round, from the 1970s to the 90s, which coincides with another upsurge in the popularity of capitalism.

Weber wrote about a limited segment of history and expressed himself cautiously about what might happen in the future. He is now part of the generation of our great-grandparents. Nevertheless, in many respects, especially for Americans, his vision is fresher now than he himself would have ever expected it to be.

The Sources of Weber's Argument

It is always possible to construct a list of antecedent authors and present them as "influences" on any particular thinker. We could of course do this for Weber, but the result would be less to clarify than to muddy the originality of his argument and to obscure the passion and immediacy of Weber's vision on this topic. The Protestant Ethic and its ramifications became something of an obsession with Weber. The reasons that his first writings on the subject are so powerful, and why they pulled him onward into one ramification after another, can be seen much more clearly if we approach the question of "sources" from the point of view of Weber's personal experience. Two personal conditions are the key: the conflicting "spirits" which Weber felt in his parents, and his visit to America in 1904.

Weber's life is a kind of Freudian melodrama, complete with family conflict, neurotic breakdown, and therapeutic recovery. He grew up in the privileged elite of German political and academic life. His father was the leader of a political party in the *Reichstag* in Berlin. During his youth Max had already met, in gatherings at home, the most famous professors in Germany; by the time he finished his university studies, he was being groomed as their successor, as the scholar who would carry social science to a new level. His only problem was to decide whether to become a leading poli-

23

tion or a famous academic, or perhaps both. Suddenly, at age 33, he had a severe attack of what can only be described as psychosomatic illness. He could no longer lecture or make political speeches and had to retire from his profession. He spent his time visiting psychiatrists, taking rest cures, going on long trips where he whiled away the hours looking idly out of hotel windows, scarcely able to work or sometimes even to think. Gradually his condition improved. In 1904, after seven years of his psychoneurotic incapacitation, he travelled to the United States. Something about America jolted him out of his illness. Returning to Germany, the first thing he published was *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. From then on, his enormous capacity for work—his own work ethic—was unleashed, resulting in thousands of pages by the end of his life.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism was the turning point in Weber's life. It was as if the argument had been bottled up inside him, while he brooded on it unconsciously for seven years.¹ When he turned his attention to America, the argument came spilling out. Thus, cured of his neurosis, he went on to become a great sociologist, some say the greatest of all time. What was it about America that was so consequential? Generalizing from his own observations of America, where he visited German-American relatives, Weber noted that America was both the most capitalist country in the world and the most religious. And he saw the connection between the two: America was so successful at capitalism because it was so Christian. Everything fell into place; the American colonies had originated with a group of radical Protestants, the Puritans, who escaped from Holland and then England in

¹ More precisely, one should say that Weber was working through the neurotic conflict during a period of time when he was gradually coming to formulate his Protestant Ethic thesis. He himself declared he had inklings of the idea in the 1890s, and he began to work on writing it in the summer just before starting on his American journey. Since his family had many American relatives, and American capitalism was already part of his awareness, circumstances probably enabled him to gain some insight into his own personal conflicts even before his visit. It is clear, however, that his actual visit to America was an exhilarating experience and marked the transition to a new intellectual as well as personal stage in his life.

the 1600s to find a land where Protestantism would truly be put into practice. It was, and capitalist America was the result.

From here it is clear how Weber constructed the Protestant Ethic: reading Ben Franklin to find the American spirit of capitalism, then reading John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (an extremely popular book in America in the 1700s and early 1800s) to immerse himself in the ethic of the radical Protestants at the time of the English civil war, and then recalling the connections to Calvin's doctrine of predestination, Martin Luther's concept of the calling, and the rest of the chain as Weber sought ever further back into the causes of Protestantism and modern capitalism. Here we are tracing the intellectual roots of Weber's idea. But let us stick to the personal side, for we have not yet answered a crucial question: why did his encounter with America cure him of his neurosis? His flash of insight into understanding the connection between Protestantism and capitalism set him free to work again; he must have been emotionally paralyzed over something which related to this question. Why should it make such a personal difference? *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is a passionately written book; all the impacted energies of Weber's life came out in it. It is a veritable Freudian catharsis, a releasing of the floods of inner conflict which had incapacitated him for seven years.

Weber never visited Sigmund Freud. In fact, Freud was just developing his own theory of neurosis during the years when Weber was undergoing his travails. A few years later, when both Weber and Freud were becoming famous, Weber became interested in the Freudian movement and even took some of its younger followers under his protection when they fell into legal troubles over their sexual radicalism. Though there was a sexual element in Weber's neurosis, that is not the main point. (The curious may pursue it by referring to Chapter 1 of my book *Max Weber: a Skeleton Key*, cited in "Suggested Further Reading" at the end of this Introduction.) Some of Freud's more general principles regarding the sources of psychological conflicts point us to the key to Weber's problem.

Weber's neurosis clearly derived from a conflict between his parents. They were opposite personality types. His father was domineering, authoritarian, self-indulgent; he was proud of his own success and social position and indulged in good

company, eating and drinking, and apparently even illicit carousing on trips away from home, since his wife was sexually very puritanical. Max's mother believed piously that religion should guide one's daily life. Anything but self-indulgent, she believed that worldly goods were in trust from God, and she scrimped at home so that she could give charity to the poor. The parents clashed in politics as well: Max's father was a leader of the political party of the center-right, representing the interests of the big capitalist manufacturers; his mother favored the Christian socialists.

The conflict came to a head in the summer of 1897 when Max's mother, struggling to get away from the dominance of her husband, came to visit Max in Heidelberg. The father showed up in Heidelberg soon after, and a long-standing family quarrel burst out in the open. Max took his mother's side and threw his father out of the house. Max never saw his father again. Before they could reconcile, the father died of a hemorrhage.

Max now sank into his illness: at first insomnia and inability to work; then he could not face a public audience and had to give up his academic and political activities. By the next year, he was stricken by physical symptoms; his arms became paralyzed when he tried to reach up to trim the Christmas tree. In clinical terms, this is a classic example of the psychosomatic illness technically called "hysteria," when conflicting psychological impulses freeze up the muscles so that one cannot move a limb. I would suggest that the gesture of reaching up over his head was part of the complex that kept him from speaking in public; Max had embarked on a political career and was known as a powerful, even fiery orator, probably complete with dramatic hand gestures to emphasize his points. Max's neurosis meant that he had to give up his political career; he could not follow in his father's footsteps and become a leading politician. All this fits the rather obvious Freudian interpretation that Max was angry at his father, that he felt guilt about having rebelled against him, and even that he felt he had killed him. And since Max had identified with his father, his rebellion was also a revolt against a part of himself.

The most valid point of Freudian theory (and I am by no means suggesting that we swallow whole everything in the Freudian system) is that repression takes place because there are things that one cannot bear to think about. Repression leads to depression and de-

pletion of emotional energy, when two unconscious forces block one another. Max Weber obviously felt hatred toward and guilt about his father, and he probably came to recognize this. What made his neurosis more severe was something deeper, which he could not stand to have enter his consciousness in any form: that he also hated his mother, with her puritanism, her attempts (highly successful, in fact) to control his sex life, and her interfering in his political career by pressing him toward Christian-socialist causes. His mother constituted a second, rival form of control that had seized Max from within. Later he was to write about the period when the neurosis was ebbing away that he felt "an icy hand has released me." The icy hand could not have been his father; it was the puritanical spirit of his mother.

Weber's father and mother struggled inside him for control of his spirit. Finding a way to depict each of them by an historical emblem allowed him suddenly to see a way clear from his neurosis, by writing his way out of it. His father and mother provided recognition of the several ingredients of the Protestant Ethic. I say several ingredients because what Weber describes in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is a conflict. He saw, on the one hand, the traditional way of doing business. Then the Protestant Ethic came in, bringing about the transformation of capitalism. Finally the wheel turned again, and the unintended consequence was to make capitalists rich—and the Protestant Ethic faded into the self-absorbed luxury of the wealthy.

Revealingly, when Weber wants to bring out the contrast, he gives a description of how things were "until about the middle of the past century . . . in the Continental textile industry" (pages 66-68). He is not referring to any scholarly study; his picture is something that he knows personally. For Weber's own family had made its fortune in the textile business, and his relatives still operated the factories. The name "Weber" itself means "weaver," indicating that the family had been identified with this occupation for centuries. His picture of the old days depicts a comfortable routine: the linen merchant receives cloth from the local peasants, pays them the customary price, and ships it off to his usual customers. Most of the year hours are short and competition is lax. The businessman has plenty of time to play the leading citizen of some picturesque little German city, drinking in the tavern, smoking a pipe, like a charac-

ter in the opera *Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg*. One day (Weber goes on), a new character appears on the scene: a young man who no longer sits around and waits for the traditional routines to unfold, but who goes out aggressively into the countryside, reorganizing the cloth weavers, bringing them under control in a factory. With any time he has to spare, he goes on business trips, soliciting customers, luring them with lower prices and higher turnover. The old leisurely pace is disrupted; the old easy-going merchants who cannot keep up are driven out of business, and hard-driving capitalist competition and growth take its place.

It was these two sides of capitalism and their ethical counterparts that Weber saw in his parents, and through them, in his whole family background. Since they were living in a later generation, the religious and economic themes were mingled in them in complex ways and were passed on into Weber's own personality into an even more complex mix. When he spoke of the "ghost of dead religious beliefs" which "prowls about in our lives" (page 182), he was probably speaking first and foremost about himself.

The fact that we can perform a quasi-Freudian analysis does not imply that the Protestant Ethic was nothing but a projection of Weber's neurosis. On the contrary, the conflict between his father and mother may have been a particularly dramatic way for him to become aware of the Protestant Ethic. My recounting of his personal history is intended to show that the Protestant Ethic is a conflict between different ways of life. These forces behind Weber's realization of this conflict were real enough. His family embodied every aspect of the history of capitalism and religious ethics; thus Max Weber was in the best spot to discover it for sociology. Another personal circumstance comes into play: because he had relatives in America, and because he visited them (or even to some degree in planning such a visit), he got the insight which unravelled and corroborated the pattern. That the insight came out of his personal experience is not a criticism of the validity of his theory, although, of course, it is not a proof of it either. The validity of his scholarship has to be judged in the usual way, in its own terms.

Two Versions of Weber's Argument: Early and Late

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, in its English-language version, is really two books in one. Weber wrote about

the connection between religion and capitalism at two different times in his life: first in 1904, which is the original Protestant Ethic argument; later (for the most part during 1916-19) he came back to the question, broadening the argument to compare Christianity and Judaism with the other major world religions, regarding their effects upon economic development. To put it a little too simply, one could say early Weber deals with the Protestant Ethic, and late Weber deals with "the Judeo-Christian Ethic" and its effect upon capitalism. Of course, there is a connection between the two arguments, since radical Protestantism is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and early Protestants (especially during the English Civil War and during the founding of Puritan New England) thought they were returning to early Christianity and even to the Judaism of the Old Testament.

In the process of expanding his argument, Weber researched and wrote many more volumes on the religions of China, India, and ancient Judaism; he intended to write further volumes on Islam, ancient Greece and early Christianity, and on medieval Catholicism, but he died in 1920 before he could do so. He did manage to complete a lengthy treatise on the sociology of religion and an entire encyclopedia, *Economy and Society*, which treats every major social institution, ranging from the family to politics, from the point of view of its effects upon the rise of modern capitalism. In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber said he did not intend to put forward a one-sided spiritual explanation of the rise of capitalism, to contrast with the one-sided Marxist materialist explanation; he was only accentuating one process by subjecting it to closer examination. Most of the rest of his life work was devoted to making good on that promise; in his later works he shows all the material and structural conditions which mingle with religious ethics and capitalist spirit. The whole thing amounts to about twenty times the length of his original work on the Protestant Ethic. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* turned out to be a mere drop in what eventually became an ocean, a sociology of world history.

I have said that the English-language version of *The Protestant Ethic*, the book you hold in your hands, is two books in one. It contains the original essay which Weber published in 1904-5; this comprises the main body of the text on pages 35-183. It also contains a piece Weber wrote later which reflects his later theory of

capitalism and his responses to critics of the original Protestant Ethic thesis. These parts are printed here in the section headed "Max Weber's Introduction to the Sociology of Religion" (pages 13-31) and in the "Notes," which take up pages 185-284. How these two versions, early and late Weber, became part of the same book can be explained as follows.

In 1920, as Weber was preparing an edition of his comparative writings on the world religions (*Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*), the first writing he included was, of course, *The Protestant Ethic*. He added another short paper which he wrote at about the same time, "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism," which consists of observations from his 1904 visit concerning Protestantism in everyday life in America. After this are reprinted his works on the religions of China, India, and ancient Judaism. To string it all together, Weber wrote some of his most important essays, printed between the major monographs, which give overall comparative reflections. Talcott Parsons, the first translator of *The Protestant Ethic* into English, took Weber's introductory essay to the whole collection and printed it as the first section of *The Protestant Ethic*, under the heading "Author's Introduction." Unfortunately, since Parsons did not put a heading in the text to mark where *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* actually began, and because of the peculiar way the pages of the first edition were numbered, generations of readers have gotten the impression that the whole thing is one text, instead of a juxtaposition of Weber's earliest and latest writings.

For this edition, I have put back the title of the original German text (at page 33) and clearly marked Weber's 1920 introduction to his *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion* by a heading which leaves no confusion that it is from a separate work. I would advise the reader—especially the student who is reading *The Protestant Ethic* for the first time—to begin where *The Protestant Ethic* actually begins, on page 35, and then come back, at the end, to read "Max Weber's Introduction to the Sociology of Religion" to see where he later took the argument.

Weber's Later Theory

Weber's later work becomes quite complex, and it would be an overload to attempt to disentangle it here. To see how the various

conditions mesh into his complete causal chain of the conditions for capitalism, one needs a diagram in the form of a flow chart. (The interested reader is referred to my *Weberian Sociological Theory* or to the comprehensive overviews by Kalberg or Käsler, listed in the "Suggested Further Reading.") Here I will only sketch how Weber developed his theory in two main directions.

(1) The religious basis of rational capitalism is not just radical Protestantism but the historical phenomenon of Christianity, indeed the entire Judeo-Christian tradition. Recall that the starting point of the whole argument was Weber's contrast between traditional and rational capitalism, which led to the search for the religious roots of traditionalism and rationalism. Weber takes Catholicism as the emblem of religious traditionalism. He focusses especially upon the medieval Catholic emphasis on rituals, penances, pilgrimages, relics of the saints, and the like, all of which Weber regards as examples of magical religion. Magic, for Weber, is the epitome of the traditional and the non-rational, which had to be eliminated before the world could be subjected to the forces of social rationality, and thus to rational capitalism.

In his later works, Weber widened his view to compare the Western religions with the Asian ones. Now he places more emphasis on the entire Judeo-Christian heritage as the religions which most sharply suppressed the magical element from religion. Judaism and Christianity are the religions with the strongest emphasis upon ethical demands, upon living a righteous religious life while in the world. In contrast, Weber tries to show that the other major world religions—Confucianism and Taoism in China, Buddhism and Hinduism in India, Islam throughout North Africa and the Middle East—retained too many elements of magic, and thereby obstructed the pathway toward social rationalization. The differences among the world religions, however, turn out to be more complicated than a contrast between the amount of magic they contain, and Weber went on to develop a typology of the several different versions of religion that are found, mixed in various proportions, in different parts of the world. Besides magical and ritualistic religions, Weber discusses both asceticism and mysticism. Then he presents further subtypes within each of the latter pair, which either directed these religious practices in an other-worldly direction or harnessed them to life within the world. At this point

in the development of the theory, the key category, instead of the Protestant Ethic or Calvinistic predestination, is "inner-worldly asceticism," living an ascetic life in the world. This is what brings about the great social transformation of rational capitalism.

Weber's comparative studies of the world religions were a huge project which he never finished. There is still controversy as to whether his model would have worked for Islam, and indeed whether it works the way Weber said it did for China. There is the even bigger question of Japan, which I will take up below.

(2) Another side of the explanation which Weber greatly expanded was to consider not just religion, but all the other sociological ingredients for rational capitalism. To simplify it greatly, Weber in his later works sketched two components or pathways, both of which need to be present if rational capitalism is to emerge. (For Weber's own summary, see Weber's *General Economic History*, Part IV, cited in the "Suggested Further Reading.")

These two component pathways are (a) the religious pathway toward a religious ethic of inner-worldly asceticism, which I have just sketched above, and (b) a political pathway. This latter encompasses the rise of the *bureaucratic state*, counterbalanced by *democratic citizenship* as the basis for a *legal system of private property*. As we can see, Weber tends to view the world as combinations of different ingredients, each of which can be disentangled into still further sub-ingredients. We cannot afford to go too far in the disentangling here; let me comment briefly on the key ingredients, the rise of bureaucracy and the combination of citizenship plus a legal system.

The essence of bureaucracy is organization by rules and regulations, which is to say by formal paperwork. Bureaucracy has a bad image in our own times, precisely because of our dislike of formal rules and paperwork, and Weber shares some of these misgivings. Nevertheless, Weber points out that bureaucracy is one of the crucial social inventions in the history of the world. Bureaucracy is impersonal; therefore, it rises above individuals, above favoritism and family connections. Bureaucracy separates the person from the job, and treats individuals as interchangeable with respect to the application of general rules. This is one of the things we dislike about bureaucracy, but it also makes possible the calculating, pre-

dictable social order within which mass-production capitalism can flourish.

The point comes home to us if we compare bureaucracy to the social forms which existed before bureaucracy was created: this was a world of feudal lords and family lineages, of hereditary aristocracies and robber barons, of states which lived on patronage and conquest and had no legal restrictions on confiscating the property of merchants or of anyone else who lacked military power. In this milieu, mass-production capitalism could not flourish. Business was limited to the versions of traditional capitalism that we have reviewed above: the long-distance luxury traders, trying to squeak through natural and political dangers in order to make one big profit which would allow them to retire from business and enter the socially dominant sector of aristocratic politics; or alternatively political-booty capitalism, making business into a search for plunder.

Weber had the same ambivalent attitude about bureaucracy that we have today. He saw it as part of the "iron cage" in which we are trapped. But Weber was above all trying to be realistic. Without the impersonal bureaucratic cage, modern life based on the rationalized, mass-production economy would be impossible.

Weber added that bureaucracy by itself would crush all private initiative. Bureaucracy is one of the ingredients leading to rational capitalism, but standing alone it acted more as a negative factor. Hence bureaucracy had to be counterbalanced by yet another factor: there needed to be a certain degree of democracy, an institution of the rights of citizens, and this had to be manifested in a legal system that protected private property. Only through this balance could government bureaucracy be turned into a support for rational capitalism. When all these conditions came together, including the appropriate religious ethic, rational capitalism could take off. In Weber's view, all this happened in Europe by around the 17th century. Modern capitalism was the result.

I have barely mentioned these several lines of causality, each of which opens out into a theory in its own right. Weber started off with the Protestant Ethic; as he went deeper and deeper into the issues that it raised, he spun off one sociological theory after another. This is how Weber became the great sociologist we look back upon: the founder of the theory of bureaucracy as well as the

comparative sociology of religion, of the sociology of law, of political sociology, of the theory of democracy, and many other things. We cannot pursue these matters here. These leads can be followed up in Weber's later works and then into the lines of sociological research and theory which have come after them.

Criticism and Further Developments

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism made Weber famous. It has been controversial since it first appeared. Some of the criticisms have been fairly low-level: for example, the argument that capitalism existed before Protestantism, or that Catholics also had capitalism. Such arguments ignore Weber's key distinctions: that he was talking about rational capitalism, not just traditional capitalism, and that his concern was not Protestantism in general, but the way in which the Calvinists harnessed religious asceticism to worldly action. Once we broaden our attention from early to late Weber, we can steer clear of a narrower Catholic-vs.-Protestant polemic by seeking out points in world history where this kind of inner-worldly asceticism has had economic effects. The most famous study along this line was Robert Bellah's *Tokugawa Religion*, which tried to show that there was an equivalent to the Protestant Ethic in Japan during the 1700s, derived from a mixture of Buddhism and Confucianism. Thus the tremendous economic success of Japanese society is not a contradiction to Weber's theory but can be seen as an extension of it, on a more abstract plane.

It is possible to go still further. As we have seen, Weber's full theory involves not only a religious ethic but a whole complex of institutions: the development of bureaucracy, a legal system, and citizenship rights. These can be found in world history in other than strictly Protestant, modern-European form. Weber himself gave some hints when he noted that Catholic monks siphoned off religious energy by confining the life of ascetic discipline to the monastery instead of releasing the energy in the world. Weber commented that this was why it was important that Luther abolished the monasteries: henceforward everyone had to live the life of a monk in one's daily life.

Following this lead, I have researched the economic importance of the Catholic monasteries themselves. (See the chapters in my

Weberian Sociological Theory, entitled "Weber's Last Theory of Capitalism" and "The Weberian Revolution of the High Middle Ages," cited in the "Suggested Further Reading.") In the monasteries, on a smaller scale, we find all the elements Weber listed as necessary ingredients for rational capitalism; the key difference was that these factors operated within a religious economy, rather than in the surrounding medieval society in general. As we now know—something scholars of Weber's generation were not yet fully aware of—there was an economic boom in the Christian Middle Ages around 1100-1300 A.D. The basis for this economic expansion was laid by the growth of the monastic orders, above all the Cistercian order led by St. Bernard. These spread through Europe during this time, expanding agricultural land, growing cash crops, establishing forges, mills, and other early forms of industry. The monks were harnessing religious energy, not just for prayer and ritual, but for making monasteries grow materially.

As I have pointed out, the same set of factors which Weber saw as generating modern capitalism in the era of the Protestant Ethic also existed 300 years earlier within the monastic economy. A religious ethic emphasizing asceticism and hard work, instead of a life of ritualism, was just what the Catholic reformers of the Middle Ages demanded. They reformed the older monasteries so that monks should no longer engage primarily in ritual and other-worldly prayer but in ceaseless efforts and rigorous control of life. Calvinist predestination, it turns out, is not the only religious doctrine compatible with this kind of religious activity. There was a Catholic ethic too, although it applied only to monks.

The other sides of Weber's model fit here too. We find the Catholic church was a pioneer in the development of bureaucracy, the form of organization centered on codified rules and regulations, record-keeping, and impersonality, exalting abstract and impersonal obligations over the power of individuals and traditions. The first bureaucracy in the Western world, in fact, was the medieval Papacy, and its courts of canon law, established to hear property disputes coming from the prosperous monasteries, became the basis for the modern law of corporate property.

A key point which I cannot fully treat here is that the monasteries broke away from the social structure dominated by families and family connections. Monks could not be married. The point of this

was not just a puritanical denial of sex but of a social connection: in a society in which everything was done by the family (hereditary aristocrats at the top, peasant families at the bottom), the monks broke the connection to the family. A monk does not inherit, nor does he have children (at least not legitimate ones), and therefore he cannot leave an inheritance. Whatever a monk accumulates by his work during his lifetime belongs to the monastery. The monastery thus transformed property law. The religious order became a new kind of organization, a corporate unit in which the products of monks' labor was accumulated, not by individuals or families, but by the organization. In effect, the medieval monastery was the first business corporation.

Here the ironic dialectic of Weber's Protestant Ethic comes into play as well. Weber noted that Calvinistic businessmen, by their hard work and frugality, ploughing back their profits into business, ended up becoming rich. The same thing happened to the Catholic monasteries: their asceticism, with the accumulation of gains ploughed back into monastic property, made them rich. The rest of the dialectic also took place. With riches came laxness and corruption. After a few hundred years, the original spirit of the medieval Catholic ethic was lost. By the early 1500s, the church, as Martin Luther viewed it, was fat and greedy, without redeeming religious merit. It was time to abolish the monasteries. When this happened, a new wave of religious motivation was set off, followed by the expansion of full-scale, mass-production capitalism.

Weber only scratched the surface of his historical theme. What he saw was the second wave of takeoff from ascetic religion to capitalism; behind it was a first wave, the "Catholic ethic" of the monastic movements, and the takeoff of the medieval economy. Without the first wave, the second wave would not have been possible.

We could go on to speculate about the future. Perhaps there will be yet a third wave of religion and capitalism, sometime in the generations ahead of us; for that matter, perhaps future historians looking back will say that it had already started in the late 20th century. Certainly we now live in a time when evangelical Protestant religion—which is to say, the same kind of inner-worldly ascetic religious activism Weber wrote about—has again become a powerful force around the world. This is also a time when capitalism seems

especially powerful, including both its change-producing and its harsh, competitive aspects.

I will forego this point in order to mention one more recent development of neo-Weberian theory. Weber was quite Euro-centric (more precisely, one should say Euro-American-centric); his project was to see how the West came to develop rational capitalism, whereas the East did not. This viewpoint ties into the familiar scenario that outside the West, capitalist development came about only by means of Western expansion, whether imitation, colonialism, or imperialism. This is the model of world modernization starting in the West and spreading around the globe as an external influence.

Weber explicitly saw this as a consequence of the Western religions. Western rational capitalism is the end-result of the Judeo-Christian pathway. But time has moved on since Weber wrote during 1905-1920. Things are visible now which Weber did not know. One of these is the tremendous economic growth of Japan in the 20th century, to the point of becoming virtually the world's leading capitalist society. In fact, Weber could have seen signs of this movement in his own day (it happens this was one of the few topics that Weber did *not* pay attention to). Japan after the Meiji Restoration (1868) was already beginning its incredibly rapid surge onto the world economic scene, the only non-Western society to do so without going through a phase of Western colonialism. Current scholarship is now showing, in more and more detail, that Japan was not simply a wonderful "copy-cat": Japan did not merely imitate Western industrialization. Already during the Tokugawa period (1600-1860), Japan was a highly commercial society, on a level with most contemporary European societies. Big capitalist businesses, like Sumitomo and Mitsui, which have become famous in the late 20th century, were already prominent in the 18th century. Now we are finding that in the pre-Tokugawa period, when Japan was in its so-called "feudal" period of domestic warfare (ca. 1460-1600), it was full of virtually independent city-states, monastic orders, and lords' private estates, which built up a solid basis for the later economic growth.

As I have argued elsewhere (see references in "Suggested Further Reading"), this was yet another case where something like the Weberian model applies but without the specific doctrines of the Protestant Ethic. For the key economic developments in the pre-

Tokugawa period are connected with the expansion of the Buddhist monastic orders around Japan, spreading a commercial market economy and bringing economic growth. The various features listed earlier as comprising the ingredients of Weber's full-scale model of the causes of rational capitalism can also be found in the Buddhist sector of medieval Japan. Behind this, if we want to trace it further, is the influence of Chinese Buddhism, since Japanese Buddhism was imported from China.

If that was so, we might ask, why wasn't there a capitalist economic takeoff in medieval China? The answer is that there indeed was. During the Sung Dynasty (960-1200), China had the most thriving market economy in the world, complete with many of the features that we associate with rationalized capitalism. And the capitalism of Sung China built up slowly in the previous period, out of the accumulation of economic gains in the Buddhist monasteries which dominated medieval China. (To mention just one instance that has a little familiarity in the West: one of the first markets for a mass-consumption product, namely tea, was pioneered in China and then in Japan by the wave of expansion of the Zen Buddhist monasteries in the countryside.) The Sung dynasty even resembles the period of the Protestant Reformation, in the sense that this was a time just after the Buddhist monasteries had been confiscated and their property taken over into secular hands. I mention these points only as a sketch and a subject which bears further investigation on many points. One of the crucial unanswered questions is how the economy of Sung China went into a crisis, so that instead of further economic development taking place in China, it shifted over to Japan.

It appears now there has been an independent East-Asian pathway toward modern capitalism. The West is not as unique as Weber—and most of the rest of us—have thought it was. This does not diminish Weber's stature as a great pioneer of comparative sociology. He uncovered first the Protestant Ethic, and then the other social structures tied to the pathway of Judaism and Christianity, which led toward modern capitalism in Europe and America. With greater historical knowledge and a further widening of the sociological concepts which Weber pioneered, we can see that there were other breakthroughs: not only a Protestant Ethic but also a "Catholic Ethic," and even a "Buddhist ethic" starting in China

and coming to greatest fruition in Japan. This expansion of our understanding, I would suggest, is also an expansion of our universal viewpoint on the underlying similarity of all humanity. Beneath the distinctive doctrines, we are all the same kind of people, responding to the same kinds of conditions for social change.

The Protestant Ethic and American Sociology

The United States has played a special role in making Max Weber famous. When Talcott Parsons first translated *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in 1930, Weber was moderately well known among scholarly specialists in Germany; but sociology in that country was a tiny, struggling field, soon to be snuffed out by the Nazis coming to power in 1933. In England and France, Weber was scarcely regarded at all. Parsons proceeded to make Weber into a truly major figure, taking *The Protestant Ethic* as the exemplar of how sociology should be done: showing the role of ideas and values rather than materialist reduction of the Marxian or even the Durkheimian sort; and showing the importance of *verstehen*, the methodology of understanding subjective orientations to social action. A few years later, in 1937, when Parsons published *The Structure of Social Action*, he elevated Weber to the pantheon of the great sociologists, along with Durkheim and Pareto. Pareto has since fallen out of the list, while Marx and George Herbert Mead have been added, but Weber has remained constant ever since as the greatest star, claimed by everybody as a supporter of at least some aspect of his or her own theoretical position. Ironically, it was via American influence that, after 1950, Weber's reputation began to slowly rise in Germany as well.

There is a more intimate connection between Weber and America. As we have seen, Weber developed much of his insight into the Protestant Ethic while on a visit to the U.S. in 1904. American society is his great example of the connection between radical Protestantism and the most dynamic form of capitalism. When he wants to epitomize the spirit of capitalism, he quotes Ben Franklin; when he sums up in his last pages about the "iron cage" of "care for external goods," he refers to the United States as "the field of its highest development." If one reads through Weber's footnotes, one will find that he did most of his research on the Protestant sects in the libraries of religious colleges in the U.S. Especially re-

vealing of the impression American religion made upon him is a companion essay to *The Protestant Ethic* which he published upon returning to Germany, "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism" (see "Suggested Further Reading"), based on his visits to German-American relatives in Ohio and North Carolina. Here he notes how the first thing a businessman had to do in moving to an American town was to join a "good" (i.e., respectable, middle-class) church, or else he could not get bank credit. Religion and business in America went hand in hand.

In Weber's later works, the Protestant Ethic thesis became watered down, or one might say, abstracted to a new level. In these writings, the focus of attention is no longer radical Protestantism in the narrow sense, but more broadly the "inner-worldly asceticism" of Christianity as it has developed ever since its antecedents in ancient Judaism. From this level of abstraction, we have seen that there can be equivalents of the Protestant Ethic, even a version of a "Catholic ethic" or a Japanese "Buddhist ethic." And structurally, Weber points to the mix of conditions bringing about rationalized capitalism, not only a religious ethic but also bureaucracy, citizenship, and law. Since Weber himself moved away from the Protestant Ethic *per se*, one might wonder why we should still be reading it, instead of concentrating on his later writings.

One answer, of course, is that *The Protestant Ethic* is the best place to begin as a well written starting point for entering a more complex problem. But there is another answer, which is especially important for American sociologists and American students. Even if the Protestant Ethic is not so central a cause of modern capitalism as we once believed, it remains extremely important for something else: the way of life or social "ethic" of the United States. Drop into the background, if you like, the notion that this is a book about the Protestant Ethic and the rise of modern capitalism in general; what takes the foreground is that this is a book about "the Protestant Ethic and the American way of life."

Many things have changed, of course, between the Puritan settlers of New England in the 1600s and the consumer-oriented society at the turn of the 21st century. Nevertheless, the Puritan ethic has had an enormous effect upon our development, and it remains one theme among the many which are contending for control even today. Moreover, it was not just the Calvinists who settled here; all

the Protestant sects which Weber describes in Chapter 5—Quakers, Methodists, Baptists—have flourished in the U.S. more than anywhere else in the world, and they have left their distinctive marks upon our lifestyle. Weber points out, for instance, that the doctrine of the separation of church and state came from these sects, and he refers to the way in which they fostered a decentralized democracy and a distrust of central government. Weber comments on the puritan tendency to dislike art but to admire science, as well as the puritan rationale for rejecting charity to the poor as incompatible with predestined salvation or damnation. When one looks at *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* closely (including the "Notes"), one sees time after time Weber pointing out themes which are major public issues today and no doubt will continue to be so in the future. Contemporary conservative movements in America appear to be struggling to continue the earlier social tendencies of the Protestant Ethic.

Modern sociologists recognize that any complex society is made up of many, often conflicting, lifestyles and beliefs. There are plenty of values and activities contrary to the Protestant Ethic today: consumerism and the accumulation of credit-card debt instead of saving and reinvestment; a leisure orientation instead of emphasis on the value of hard work; movements for social altruism instead of the individualistic pursuit of spiritual or material success; even a return of "political booty" capitalism in the form of stock-market manipulation and speculation on international money markets, instead of the slow accumulation of small gains through expansion of mass production. Weber himself understood this kind of thing in principle; this is why he took as his methodology the analysis of ideal types, one-sided constructions which accentuate just one of the many forms found mixed together in real life. What makes *The Protestant Ethic* relevant is that it describes a key ingredient which still struggles with all the contrary tendencies of American life. Understanding the outcome of that struggle is one of the key problems for sociologists today.

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**Practical Advice for Instructors and Students on
How to Read *The Protestant Ethic***

Many portions of *The Protestant Ethic* are very well written and even have a memorable literary flair. There are also places where Weber goes into detail in discussing theological texts and in pointing out the differences among the various kinds of Protestantism; here the new reader is in danger of losing track of the main argument. The main points can be captured by reading:

Part I (Chapters 1-3), and above all the crucial Chapter 2, "The Spirit of Capitalism."

In Part II, Section A of Chapter 4, headed "Calvinism."

Chapter 5, which brings together the pieces of Weber's argument, leads off with some further textual analysis of the writings of an English Puritan, Richard Baxter. The key summary begins at page 166, with the words "Let us now try to clarify the points in which the Puritan idea of the calling . . . was bound directly to influence the development of a capitalist way of life," and continues to the end (page 183) with Weber's famous image of living in the iron cage.

Max Weber's "Introduction to the Sociology of Religion," which is traditionally printed at the beginning of *The Protestant Ethic* (and without an explanatory title), was written 15 years later and gives a much more complex line of theory. I would suggest that the student read this section *after* reading the main body of the text (or save it for a more advanced course).

The "Notes" which follow the end of the text were for the most part written later, as Weber answered his critics. The introductory student is not likely to find the detail here very worthwhile. Nevertheless, Weber raises some significant points here and there in the "Notes," which I list in case someone wishes to follow up particular topics and ideas:

Weber's "Introduction," footnote 6, page 186: the difference between "rational" capitalism and "political adventurers" or "booty" capitalism, and instances where they blend together.

Chapter 1, footnote 9, pages 193-4: the complexity of what it means to call something "rational" or "irrational."

Chapter 1, footnote 12, pages 194-8: compares the difference in "economic ethics" between an Italian Renaissance aristocrat, whom Weber regards as exemplifying the pre-modern attitude toward capitalism, and Franklin, who exemplifies the modern rationalized spirit.

Chapter 4, footnote 30, pages 223-5: American individualism and resistance to political authority. See also footnote 178, pages 255-6, on Puritanism as a source of American democracy.

Chapter 4, footnote 34, pages 225-6: the impersonality of Puritan "brotherly love" (a tone which Weber obviously disliked).

Chapter 4, footnote 36, pages 226-7: the popularity of the idea of predestination among Christians and its difference from the Muslim idea of belief in predetermination (which applies to the worldly life and not to the afterlife).

Chapter 4, footnote 66, pages 232-3: psychological and logical aspects of religion, with a comparison to William James' analysis of religious experience.

Chapter 4, footnote 73, page 234: Protestantism, avoiding even a single sin, as compared to Catholicism, treating the balance of sins and good works as a kind of bank account.

Chapter 4, footnote 79, page 235: Protestantism took Catholic monasticism and moved it into the world.

Chapter 4, footnote 81, page 235: Protestantism's effects upon military discipline, visible in Cromwell's army of Roundheads, as compared to the knightly passion of the Cavaliers.

Chapter 4, footnote 110, pages 242-3: radical Puritanism as the origin of political toleration of religious freedom and of the separation of church and state.

Chapter 4, footnote 145, page 249: the source of the famous "Merton thesis" that Protestantism gave rise to modern science. See also Chapter 5, footnote 73, page 275.

Chapter 5, footnote 22, pages 263-4: sexual puritanism and the emancipation of women.

Chapter 5, footnote 31, page 265: the Hindu religious ethic in regard to worldly duties.

- Chapter 5, footnote 37, page 266: the Puritan belief was not to "love thy neighbour *more than* thyself," but only at the same amount; i.e. self-regard is a duty.
- Chapter 5, footnote 45, page 268: Puritan opposition to charity for the poor (a theme which echoes again in the conservative American politics of welfare reform in the 1990s).
- Chapter 5, footnote 47, page 268: the American emphasis upon the individual's self-made success, compared to the medieval attitude that only an inherited position is honorable.
- Chapter 5, footnote 58, pages 270-1: medieval Jewish business ethics as traditional, compared to the Puritan organization of labor.
- Chapter 5, footnote 64, page 272, and footnote 68, page 274: the Puritan attitude led to the decline of English and American music (with the exception of Negro church choirs); and the Puritan attitude toward art generally (relevant for conservative attacks on American museums in the 1980s and 90s).
- Chapter 5, footnote 67, pages 273-4: why the Dutch were less influenced by Puritanism than England.
- Chapter 5, footnote 70, page 274: Puritans as the source of modern haircuts and clothing styles.
- Chapter 5, footnotes 84-5, page 277, and footnote 107, page 282: Marxist materialist interpretation is partly correct, but only partly, especially in regard to the development of Puritan New England compared to the Southern colonies.
- Chapter 5, footnote 108, page 282: the joylessness of modern work as an ascetic duty.
- Chapter 5, footnote 115, page 283: a quotation from Weber's visit to German-American families in Ohio, illustrating the difference between the work ethic in the two societies.
- Chapter 5, footnotes 118-19, pages 283-4: Weber's concluding comments on the relation between the Protestant Ethic and his wider work on the sociology of religion.

Suggested Further Reading

The Protestant Ethic Thesis:

Gordon Marshall, *In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism. An Essay on Max Weber's Protestant Ethic Thesis*. New York: Columbia Uni-

versity Press, 1982. A thorough discussion of the controversies that have followed the "Weber thesis."

Harvey Goldman, *Politics, Death and the Devil: Self and Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. Emphasizes the importance of strong personalities, such as persons imbued with the Protestant Ethic, as the driving force in Weber's theory of social change.

Contemporary Sociology of Religion:

Robert Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse. Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989. Part I shows how Catholic and Protestant doctrines meshed with their opposing modes of daily life, during the historical period Weber was concerned with in *The Protestant Ethic*.

Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992. These two books show the long-term pattern of religion in the growth of American society, and explain some of the conditions behind the periodic revival of what they call "high-tension" religiousness similar to the Protestant Ethic.

Weber's Life and Work:

Dirk Käsler, *Max Weber: An Introduction to His Life and Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

Stephen Kalberg, *Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. Käsler, Bendix, and Kalberg give comprehensive overviews of Weber's life and ideas, written by the leading German and American experts.

Randall Collins, *Max Weber: A Skeleton Key*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986. A brief overview; read Chapter 1 for a psycho-biographical interpretation of Weber's breakdown as a key to the conflicting strands of his sociology.

Alan Sica, *Weber, Irrationality and Social Order*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Jeffrey Alexander, *Theoretical Logic in Sociology. Vol. 3. The Classical Attempt at Theoretical Synthesis: Max Weber*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Sica and Alexander stand out by arguing, in their different ways, that the various parts of Weber's multi-sided intellectual personality are inconsistent: i.e., that there is more than one Weber.

Further Writings by Weber:

Max Weber, *Economy and Society*. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968. (Originally published 1922). Weber's most comprehensive statement; one could spend a lifetime studying it.

Max Weber, *General Economic History*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1981. These lectures which Weber delivered at the end of his life give his most comprehensive overview of the development of capitalism; for the overall model, read Part IV, "The Origin of Modern Capitalism."

Max Weber, *The Religion of China*. New York: Free Press, 1951; *Ancient Judaism*. New York: Free Press, 1952; *The Religion of India*. New York: Free Press, 1958. Originally published 1916-19, these three books are all that Weber completed of his comparative studies of the world religions, designed to show how the Judeo-Christian pathway led to rationalized capitalism in the West.

Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946. Contains two of Weber's essays very much worth reading in conjunction with *The Protestant Ethic*: "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism" was also written just after he returned from America; it contains Weber's observations on how Americans regarded belonging to a church as crucial for their business reputations. "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions" was written at the time of Weber's later comparative studies of the world religions. It contains some stunningly accurate anticipations of what modern life would be like later in the twentieth century, especially the tendency for people to become alienated from rationalized institutions and to withdraw their value-commitments into the private enjoyment of entertainment and erotic life.

Later Developments of Weberian Theory of Capitalism:

Talcott Parsons, *Societies: Comparative and Evolutionary Perspectives*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966. Follows up Weber's line of argument by showing that the evolution of world societies were set off along different pathways by their religions.

Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Preindustrial Japan*. New York: Free Press, 1957. Argues that Japan's rapid modernization was impelled by its own indigenous religious equivalent of the Protestant Ethic.

Randall Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986. The chapters "Weber's Last Theory of Capitalism" and "The Weberian Revolution of the High Middle Ages" contain the argument that Weber's full-scale theory leads us to find prior take-offs of rational capitalism in the religious economies of the Christian Middle Ages in Europe and in the Buddhist-dominated dynasties of medieval China. The point that medieval Chinese capitalism was transmitted to Japan through the Buddhist monasteries, giving rise to an independent East-Asian path to modernization, is developed in Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (forthcoming). Good sources on early Japanese economic development are Chie Nakane and Shinzaburo Oishi, *Tokugawa Japan: Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1990; and Neil McMullin, *Buddhism and the State in Sixteenth Century Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

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**MAX WEBER'S INTRODUCTION
TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION (1920)**

A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value.

Only in the West does science exist at a stage of development which we recognize to-day as valid. Empirical knowledge, reflection on problems of the cosmos and of life, philosophical and theological wisdom of the most profound sort, are not confined to it, though in the case of the last the full development of a systematic theology must be credited to Christianity under the influence of Hellenism, since there were only fragments in Islam and in a few Indian sects. In short, knowledge and observation of great refinement have existed elsewhere, above all in India, China, Babylonia, Egypt. But in Babylonia and elsewhere astronomy lacked—which makes its development all the more astounding—the mathematical foundation which it first received from the Greeks. The Indian geometry had no rational proof; that was another product of the Greek intellect, also the creator of mechanics and physics. The Indian natural sciences, though well developed in observation, lacked the method of experiment, which was, apart from beginnings in antiquity, essentially a product of the Renaissance, as was the modern laboratory. Hence medicine, especially in India, though highly developed

In order to consistently reproduce the translator's original pagination, the text of the translation begins on page 13.

in empirical technique, lacked a biological and particularly a biochemical foundation. A rational chemistry has been absent from all areas of culture except the West.

The highly developed historical scholarship of China did not have the method of Thucydides. Machiavelli, it is true, had predecessors in India; but all Indian political thought was lacking in a systematic method comparable to that of Aristotle, and, indeed, in the possession of rational concepts. Not all the anticipations in India (School of Mimamsa), nor the extensive codification especially in the Near East, nor all the Indian and other books of law, had the strictly systematic forms of thought, so essential to a rational jurisprudence, of the Roman law and of the Western law under its influence. A structure like the canon law is known only to the West.

A similar statement is true of art. The musical ear of other peoples has probably been even more sensitively developed than our own, certainly not less so. Polyphonic music of various kinds has been widely distributed over the earth. The co-operation of a number of instruments and also the singing of parts have existed elsewhere. All our rational tone intervals have been known and calculated. But rational harmonious music, both counterpoint and harmony, formation of the tone material on the basis of three triads with the harmonic third; our chromatics and enharmonics, not interpreted in terms of space, but, since the Renaissance, of harmony; our orchestra, with its string quartet as a nucleus, and the organization of ensembles of wind instruments; our bass accompani-

ment; our system of notation, which has made possible the composition and production of modern musical works, and thus their very survival; our sonatas, symphonies, operas; and finally, as means to all these, our fundamental instruments, the organ, piano, violin, etc.; all these things are known only in the Occident, although programme music, tone poetry, alteration of tones and chromatics, have existed in various musical traditions as means of expression.

In architecture, pointed arches have been used elsewhere as a means of decoration, in antiquity and in Asia; presumably the combination of pointed arch and cross-arched vault was not unknown in the Orient. But the rational use of the Gothic vault as a means of distributing pressure and of roofing spaces of all forms, and above all as the constructive principle of great monumental buildings and the foundation of a *style* extending to sculpture and painting, such as that created by our Middle Ages, does not occur elsewhere. The technical basis of our architecture came from the Orient. But the Orient lacked that solution of the problem of the dome and that type of classic rationalization of all art—in painting by the rational utilization of lines and spatial perspective—which the Renaissance created for us. There was printing in China. But a printed literature, designed *only* for print and only possible through it, and, above all, the Press and periodicals, have appeared only in the Occident. Institutions of higher education of all possible types, even some superficially similar to our universities, or at least academies, have existed (China, Islam). But a rational, systematic, and specialized pursuit of science,

with trained and specialized personnel, has only existed in the West in a sense at all approaching its present dominant place in our culture. Above all is this true of the trained official, the pillar of both the modern State and of the economic life of the West. He forms a type of which there have heretofore only been suggestions, which have never remotely approached its present importance for the social order. Of course the official, even the specialized official, is a very old constituent of the most various societies. But no country and no age has ever experienced, in the same sense as the modern Occident, the absolute and complete dependence of its whole existence, of the political, technical, and economic conditions of its life, on a specially trained *organization* of officials. The most important functions of the everyday life of society have come to be in the hands of technically, commercially, and above all legally trained government officials.

Organization of political and social groups in feudal classes has been common. But even the feudal¹ state of *rex et regnum* in the Western sense has only been known to our culture. Even more are parliaments of periodically elected representatives, with government by demagogues and party leaders as ministers responsible to the parliaments, peculiar to us, although there have, of course, been parties, in the sense of organizations for exerting influence and gaining control of political power, all over the world. In fact, the State itself, in the sense of a political association with a rational, written constitution, rationally ordained law, and an administration bound to rational rules or laws,

administered by trained officials, is known, in this combination of characteristics, only in the Occident, despite all other approaches to it.

And the same is true of the most fateful force in our modern life, capitalism. The impulse to acquisition, pursuit of gain, of money, of the greatest possible amount of money, has in itself nothing to do with capitalism. This impulse exists and has existed among waiters, physicians, coachmen, artists, prostitutes, dishonest officials, soldiers, nobles, crusaders, gamblers, and beggars. One may say that it has been common to all sorts and conditions of men at all times and in all countries of the earth, wherever the objective possibility of it is or has been given. It should be taught in the kindergarten of cultural history that this naïve idea of capitalism must be given up once and for all. Unlimited greed for gain is not in the least identical with capitalism, and is still less its spirit. Capitalism *may* even be identical with the restraint, or at least a rational tempering, of this irrational impulse. But capitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever *renewed* profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise. For it must be so: in a wholly capitalistic order of society, an individual capitalistic enterprise which did not take advantage of its opportunities for profit-making would be doomed to extinction.

Let us now define our terms somewhat more carefully than is generally done. We will define a capitalistic economic action as one which rests on the expectation of profit by the utilization of opportunities for exchange, that is on (formally) peaceful chances of profit. Acquisition by force (formally and actually) follows its own

particular laws, and it is not expedient, however little one can forbid this, to place it in the same category with action which is, in the last analysis, oriented to profits from exchange.² Where capitalistic acquisition is rationally pursued, the corresponding action is adjusted to calculations in terms of capital. This means that the action is adapted to a systematic utilization of goods or personal services as means of acquisition in such a way that, at the close of a business period, the balance of the enterprise in money assets (or, in the case of a continuous enterprise, the periodically estimated money value of assets) exceeds the capital, i.e. the estimated value of the material means of production used for acquisition in exchange. It makes no difference whether it involves a quantity of goods entrusted *in natura* to a travelling merchant, the proceeds of which may consist in other goods *in natura* acquired by trade, or whether it involves a manufacturing enterprise, the assets of which consist of buildings, machinery, cash, raw materials, partly and wholly manufactured goods, which are balanced against liabilities. The important fact is always that a calculation of capital in terms of money is made, whether by modern book-keeping methods or in any other way, however primitive and crude. Everything is done in terms of balances: at the beginning of the enterprise an initial balance, before every individual decision a calculation to ascertain its probable profitableness, and at the end a final balance to ascertain how much profit has been made. For instance, the initial balance of a *commenda*³ transaction would determine an agreed money value of the assets put into

it (so far as they were not in money form already), and a final balance would form the estimate on which to base the distribution of profit and loss at the end. So far as the transactions are rational, calculation underlies every single action of the partners. That a really accurate calculation or estimate may not exist, that the procedure is pure guess-work, or simply traditional and conventional, happens even to-day in every form of capitalistic enterprise where the circumstances do not demand strict accuracy. But these are points affecting only the *degree* of rationality of capitalistic acquisition.

For the purpose of this conception all that matters is that an actual adaptation of economic action to a comparison of money income with money expenses takes place, no matter how primitive the form. Now in this sense capitalism and capitalistic enterprises, even with a considerable rationalization of capitalistic calculation, have existed in all civilized countries of the earth, so far as economic documents permit us to judge. In China, India, Babylon, Egypt, Mediterranean antiquity, and the Middle Ages, as well as in modern times. These were not merely isolated ventures, but economic enterprises which were entirely dependent on the continual renewal of capitalistic undertakings, and even continuous operations. However, trade especially was for a long time not continuous like our own, but consisted essentially in a series of individual undertakings. Only gradually did the activities of even the large merchants acquire an inner cohesion (with branch organizations, etc.). In any case, the capitalistic enterprise and the capitalistic entrepreneur, not only

as occasional but as regular entrepreneurs, are very old and were very widespread.

Now, however, the Occident has developed capitalism both to a quantitative extent, and (carrying this quantitative development) in types, forms, and directions which have never existed elsewhere. All over the world there have been merchants, wholesale and retail, local and engaged in foreign trade. Loans of all kinds have been made, and there have been banks with the most various functions, at least comparable to ours of, say, the sixteenth century. Sea loans,⁴ *commenda*, and transactions and associations similar to the *Kommanditgesellschaft*,⁵ have all been widespread, even as continuous businesses. Whenever money finances of public bodies have existed, money-lenders have appeared, as in Babylon, Hellas, India, China, Rome. They have financed wars and piracy, contracts and building operations of all sorts. In overseas policy they have functioned as colonial entrepreneurs, as planters with slaves, or directly or indirectly forced labour, and have farmed domains, offices, and, above all, taxes. They have financed party leaders in elections and *condottieri* in civil wars. And, finally, they have been speculators in chances for pecuniary gain of all kinds. This kind of entrepreneur, the capitalistic adventurer, has existed everywhere. With the exception of trade and credit and banking transactions, their activities were predominantly of an irrational and speculative character, or directed to acquisition by force, above all the acquisition of booty, whether directly in war or in the form of continuous fiscal booty by exploitation of subjects.

The capitalism of promoters, large-scale speculators, concession hunters, and much modern financial capitalism even in peace time, but, above all, the capitalism especially concerned with exploiting wars, bears this stamp even in modern Western countries, and some, but only some, parts of large-scale international trade are closely related to it, to-day as always.

But in modern times the Occident has developed, in addition to this, a very different form of capitalism which has appeared nowhere else: the rational capitalistic organization of (formally) free labour. Only suggestions of it are found elsewhere. Even the organization of free labour reached a considerable degree of rationality only on plantations and to a very limited extent in the *Ergasteria* of antiquity. In the manors, manorial workshops, and domestic industries on estates with serf labour it was probably somewhat less developed. Even real domestic industries with free labour have definitely been proved to have existed in only a few isolated cases outside the Occident. The frequent use of day labourers led in a very few cases—especially State monopolies, which are, however, very different from modern industrial organization—to manufacturing organizations, but never to a rational organization of apprenticeship in the handicrafts like that of our Middle Ages.

Rational industrial organization, attuned to a regular market, and neither to political nor irrationally speculative opportunities for profit, is not, however, the only peculiarity of Western capitalism. The modern rational organization of the capitalistic enterprise would not have been possible without two other important factors in its development: the separation of business from

the household, which completely dominates modern economic life, and closely connected with it, rational book-keeping. A spatial separation of places of work from those of residence exists elsewhere, as in the Oriental bazaar and in the *ergasteria* of other cultures. The development of capitalistic associations with their own accounts is also found in the Far East, the Near East, and in antiquity. But compared to the modern independence of business enterprises, those are only small beginnings. The reason for this was particularly that the indispensable requisites for this independence, our rational business book-keeping and our legal separation of corporate from personal property, were entirely lacking, or had only begun to develop.⁶ The tendency everywhere else was for acquisitive enterprises to arise as parts of a royal or manorial *household* (of the *oikos*), which is, as Rodbertus has perceived, with all its superficial similarity, a fundamentally different, even opposite, development.

However, all these peculiarities of Western capitalism have derived their significance in the last analysis only from their association with the capitalistic organization of labour. Even what is generally called commercialization, the development of negotiable securities and the rationalization of speculation, the exchanges, etc., is connected with it. For without the rational capitalistic organization of labour, all this, so far as it was possible at all, would have nothing like the same significance, above all for the social structure and all the specific problems of the modern Occident connected with it. Exact calculation—the basis of everything else—is only possible on a basis of free labour.⁷

And just as, or rather because, the world has known no rational organization of labour outside the modern Occident, it has known no rational socialism. Of course, there has been civic economy, a civic food-supply policy, mercantilism and welfare policies of princes, rationing, regulation of economic life, protectionism, and *laissez-faire* theories (as in China). The world has also known socialistic and communistic experiments of various sorts: family, religious, or military communism, State socialism (in Egypt), monopolistic cartels, and consumers' organizations. But although there have everywhere been civic market privileges, companies, guilds, and all sorts of legal differences between town and country, the concept of the citizen has not existed outside the Occident, and that of the bourgeoisie outside the modern Occident. Similarly, the proletariat as a class could not exist, because there was no rational organization of free labour under regular discipline. Class struggles between creditor and debtor classes; landowners and the landless, serfs, or tenants; trading interests and consumers or landlords, have existed everywhere in various combinations. But even the Western mediæval struggles between putters-out and their workers exist elsewhere only in beginnings. The modern conflict of the large-scale industrial entrepreneur and free-wage labourers was entirely lacking. And thus there could be no such problems as those of socialism.

Hence in a universal history of culture the central problem for us is not, in the last analysis, even from a purely economic view-point, the development of capitalistic activity as such, differing in different cultures only

in form: the adventurer type, or capitalism in trade, war, politics, or administration as sources of gain. It is rather the origin of this sober bourgeois capitalism with its rational organization of free labour. Or in terms of cultural history, the problem is that of the origin of the Western bourgeois class and of its peculiarities, a problem which is certainly closely connected with that of the origin of the capitalistic organization of labour, but is not quite the same thing. For the bourgeois as a class existed prior to the development of the peculiar modern form of capitalism, though, it is true, only in the Western hemisphere.

Now the peculiar modern Western form of capitalism has been, at first sight, strongly influenced by the development of technical possibilities. Its rationality is to-day essentially dependent on the calculability of the most important technical factors. But this means fundamentally that it is dependent on the peculiarities of modern science, especially the natural sciences based on mathematics and exact and rational experiment. On the other hand, the development of these sciences and of the technique resting upon them now receives important stimulation from these capitalistic interests in its practical economic application. It is true that the origin of Western science cannot be attributed to such interests. Calculation, even with decimals, and algebra have been carried on in India, where the decimal system was invented. But it was only made use of by developing capitalism in the West, while in India it led to no modern arithmetic or book-keeping. Neither was the origin of mathematics and mechanics determined by capitalistic interests. But the *technical* utiliza-

tion of scientific knowledge, so important for the living conditions of the mass of people, was certainly encouraged by economic considerations, which were extremely favourable to it in the Occident. But this encouragement was derived from the peculiarities of the social structure of the Occident. We must hence ask, from *what* parts of that structure was it derived, since not all of them have been of equal importance?

Among those of undoubted importance are the rational structures of law and of administration. For modern rational capitalism has need, not only of the technical means of production, but of a calculable legal system and of administration in terms of formal rules. Without it adventurous and speculative trading capitalism and all sorts of politically determined capitalisms are possible, but no rational enterprise under individual initiative, with fixed capital and certainty of calculations. Such a legal system and such administration have been available for economic activity in a comparative state of legal and formalistic perfection only in the Occident. We must hence inquire where that law came from. Among other circumstances, capitalistic interests have in turn undoubtedly also helped, but by no means alone nor even principally, to prepare the way for the predominance in law and administration of a class of jurists specially trained in rational law. But these interests did not themselves create that law. Quite different forces were at work in this development. And why did not the capitalistic interests do the same in China or India? Why did not the scientific, the artistic, the political, or the economic development there enter upon that path of rationalization which is peculiar to the Occident?

For in all the above cases it is a question of the specific and peculiar rationalism of Western culture. Now by this term very different things may be understood, as the following discussion will repeatedly show. There is, for example, rationalization of mystical contemplation, that is of an attitude which, viewed from other departments of life, is specifically irrational, just as much as there are rationalizations of economic life, of technique, of scientific research, of military training, of law and administration. Furthermore, each one of these fields may be rationalized in terms of very different ultimate values and ends, and what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another. Hence rationalizations of the most varied character have existed in various departments of life and in all areas of culture. To characterize their differences from the view-point of cultural history it is necessary to know what departments are rationalized, and in what direction. It is hence our first concern to work out and to explain genetically the special peculiarity of Occidental rationalism, and within this field that of the modern Occidental form. Every such attempt at explanation must, recognizing the fundamental importance of the economic factor, above all take account of the economic conditions. But at the same time the opposite correlation must not be left out of consideration. For though the development of economic rationalism is partly dependent on rational technique and law, it is at the same time determined by the ability and disposition of men to adopt certain types of practical rational conduct. When these types have been obstructed by spiritual obstacles, the

development of rational economic conduct has also met serious inner resistance. The magical and religious forces, and the ethical ideas of duty based upon them, have in the past always been among the most important formative influences on conduct. In the studies collected here we shall be concerned with these forces.⁸

Two older essays have been placed at the beginning which attempt, at one important point, to approach the side of 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 modern economic life with the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism. Thus we treat here only one side of the causal chain. The later studies on the Economic Ethics of the World Religions attempt, in the form of a survey of the relations of the most important religions to economic life and to the social stratification of their environment, to follow out both causal relationships, so far as it is necessary in order to find points of comparison with the Occidental development. For only in this way is it possible to attempt a causal evaluation of those elements of the economic ethics of the Western religions which differentiate them from others, with a hope of attaining even a tolerable degree of approximation. Hence these studies do not claim to be complete analyses of cultures, however brief. On the contrary, in every culture they quite deliberately emphasize the elements in which it differs from Western civilization. They are, hence, definitely oriented to the problems which seem important for the understanding of Western culture from

this view-point. With our object in view, any other procedure did not seem possible. But to avoid misunderstanding we must here lay special emphasis on the limitation of our purpose.

In another respect the uninitiated at least must be warned against exaggerating the importance of these investigations. The Sinologist, the Indologist, the Semitist, or the Egyptologist, will of course find no facts unknown to him. We only hope that he will find nothing definitely wrong in points that are essential. How far it has been possible to come as near this ideal as a non-specialist is able to do, the author cannot know. It is quite evident that anyone who is forced to rely on translations, and furthermore on the use and evaluation of monumental, documentary, or literary sources, has to rely himself on a specialist literature which is often highly controversial, and the merits of which he is unable to judge accurately. Such a writer must make modest claims for the value of his work. All the more so since the number of available translations of real sources (that is, inscriptions and documents) is, especially for China, still very small in comparison with what exists and is important. From all this follows the definitely provisional character of these studies, and especially of the parts dealing with Asia.⁹ Only the specialist is entitled to a final judgment. And, naturally, it is only because expert studies with this special purpose and from this particular view-point have not hitherto been made, that the present ones have been written at all. They are destined to be superseded in a much more important sense than this can be said, as it can be, of all scientific work. But however objection-

able it may be, such trespassing on other special fields cannot be avoided in comparative work. But one must take the consequences by resigning oneself to considerable doubts regarding the degree of one's success.

Fashion and the zeal of the *literati* would have us think that the specialist can to-day be spared, or degraded to a position subordinate to that of the seer. Almost all sciences owe something to dilettantes, often very valuable view-points. But dilettantism as a leading principle would be the end of science. He who yearns for seeing should go to the cinema, though it will be offered to him copiously to-day in literary form in the present field of investigation also.¹⁰ Nothing is farther from the intent of these thoroughly serious studies than such an attitude. And, I might add, whoever wants a sermon should go to a conventicle. The question of the relative value of the cultures which are compared here will not receive a single word. It is true that the path of human destiny cannot but appall him who surveys a section of it. But he will do well to keep his small personal commentaries to himself, as one does at the sight of the sea or of majestic mountains, unless he knows himself to be called and gifted to give them expression in artistic or prophetic form. In most other cases the voluminous talk about intuition does nothing but conceal a lack of perspective toward the object, which merits the same judgment as a similar lack of perspective toward men.

Some justification is needed for the fact that ethnographical material has not been utilized to anything like the extent which the value of its contributions naturally demands in any really thorough investigation,

especially of Asiatic religions. This limitation has not only been imposed because human powers of work are restricted. This omission has also seemed to be permissible because we are here necessarily dealing with the religious ethics of the classes which were the culture-bearers of their respective countries. We are concerned with the influence which *their* conduct has had. Now it is quite true that this can only be completely known in all its details when the facts from ethnography and folk-lore have been compared with it. Hence we must expressly admit and emphasize that this is a gap to which the ethnographer will legitimately object. I hope to contribute something to the closing of this gap in a systematic study of the Sociology of Religion.¹¹ But such an undertaking would have transcended the limits of this investigation with its closely circumscribed purpose. It has been necessary to be content with bringing out the points of comparison with our Occidental religions as well as possible.

Finally, we may make a reference to the *anthropological* side of the problem. When we find again and again that, even in departments of life apparently mutually independent, certain types of rationalization have developed in the Occident, and only there, it would be natural to suspect that the most important reason lay in differences of heredity. The author admits that he is inclined to think the importance of biological heredity very great. But in spite of the notable achievements of anthropological research, I see up to the present no way of exactly or even approximately measuring either the extent or, above all, the form of its influence on the development investigated here.

It must be one of the tasks of sociological and historical investigation first to analyse all the influences and causal relationships which can satisfactorily be explained in terms of reactions to environmental conditions. Only then, and when comparative racial neurology and psychology shall have progressed beyond their present and in many ways very promising beginnings, can we hope for even the probability of a satisfactory answer to that problem.¹² In the meantime that condition seems to me not to exist, and an appeal to heredity would therefore involve a premature renunciation of the possibility of knowledge attainable now, and would shift the problem to factors (at present) still unknown.