The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MAX WEBER

Max Weber was born in 1864, the oldest of seven siblings, to a wealthy civil servant and an ascetic Calvinist mother. His father's status as a public figure resulted in Weber growing up steeped in intellectual conversations about social development and politics. Weber was intelligent beyond his years and, as a result, was bored by school. Instead of doing his assignments, he read every volume of work that Goethe ever wrote, which reportedly shaped his thought for the rest of his life. In 1882, Weber began his secondary education, from which he graduated as a junior lawyer. In 1889, Weber earned his doctorate by writing an economic history of the Middle Ages. Within a few years, he became a lecturer at the University of Berlin and started consulting with the German government as an economist. He became involved in politics and social action, joining the leftist Evangelical Social Congress and arguing against Polish immigration into Germany, which he believed to be motivated by the wrong ideals. Other researches contracted him to study the economic aspects of the migration, and Weber began his rise to fame as a social scientist. In 1893, Weber married his cousin Marianne, who herself was an author, activist, and feminist, and organized and published much of his work after his death. Four years later, Weber's father died only weeks after they had a terrible argument that remained unresolved. His father's death and his own guilt seemed to contribute to severe and sudden depression and insomnia. Weber's bout of mental illness forced him to leave his professorship and spend several months in a sanatorium in 1900. Weber returned to teaching a few years later, but soon had to leave again on account of his mental illness. However, during this time Weber produced his most famous works as he shifted his full focus to social science and understanding the modern age through historical developments. In 1904, Weber published the first version of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which marked the beginning of his study of religion as a primary social force. Weber continued as an independent academic until World War I, where he volunteered to serve as a reserve officer, in charge of logistics for Germany's army hospitals. Although Weber initially supported the German war effort, before its end he became one of the leading critics of German imperialism. After the war, he made an unsuccessful political run, and then resumed his professorship in 1919. The following year, Weber contracted influenza and died of pneumonia at the young age of 56.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1517, the German monk Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany, criticizing what he viewed as corrupt doctrines and practices. His criticisms soon became famous across Germany and initiated the early stages of the Protestant Reformation, in which Christians all across Europe left the Catholic Church, rejecting its religious authority over life and society. Luther's rebellion inspired a passionate frenzy, but also a sense of anarchy and religious rivalry across Europe. The French theologian John Calvin, working from Germany, built on Luther's ideas to develop the doctrines now known as Calvinism, which Protestants loosely agreed upon in order to give shape to their newly liberated religious practice. Without the unifying force of the Catholic Church, Protestantism continually split and subdivided into more denominations and sects, most notably English Puritanism, which descended from Calvinism; Lutheranism, which held to Luther's looser ideals; and Methodism, Pietism, The Quakers, the Mennonites, and the Baptists, all of which mixed and combined elements of Calvinism and Lutheranism. The development of the Quakers, Mennonites, and Baptists are particularly significant, since these denominations formed the basis of early American society, and led to American antagonism toward Catholics, which was seen during the influx of Irish, Polish, and Italian immigrants in the 19th and 20th century.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Although Max Weber died during his most prolific years, he remains one of the pinnacle figures of modern sociology, especially as it applies to Western society. As in *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber continued his study of religion's impact on social and economic behavior with his three subsequent volumes, *The Religion of China*, *The Religion of India*, and *Ancient Judaism*. Additionally, his wide-ranging collection of sociological theories, *Economy and Society*—finished and published posthumously by his wife, Marianne—continues his examination of religion's formative role in society and politics. Weber is widely considered one of three key figures of modern sociology alongside Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim. Durkheim innovated in the use of statistical data to track sociological patterns, which can be seen especially in his monograph, *Suicide*, which compares suicide patterns and rates among Protestant and Catholic populations. Durkheim also promoted the idea that society is a moral entity rather than merely a mass of people, and theorizes in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* on how to hold society together in the modern era, while religious and family ties dissolve. Marx is, of course, best known for his *Critique of Political Economy*, which takes many of Weber's same reservations about capitalism and explores the

inherent risks of capitalist society. Marx's deep opposition to capitalism led him to write *The Communist Manifesto*, which was taken (and arguably distorted) to form the basis of modern Communism.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
- **When Written:** 1904
- **Where Written:** Berlin, Germany
- **When Published:** 1905
- **Literary Period:** N/A
- **Genre:** Sociology
- **Setting:** Europe and America

EXTRA CREDIT

Early Death. Although Weber finished his first edition of the book in 1904, it was not translated into English until 1930, 10 years after his death. Thus, he was not able to see the full effects of its influence and spread throughout sociological study.

PLOT SUMMARY

Max Weber states that in every country with multiple Christian denominations (at least in Europe and America) a certain "social stratification" occurs between Protestants and Catholics—Protestants occupy the majority of the business leadership and skilled labor roles, while Catholics languish behind, often spending their entire lives as mere craftsmen. Weber recognizes that there are some historical contributors to this phenomenon, but argues that they are not enough to account for the "distinct mental characteristics" between Catholics and Protestants. While Catholics shy away from gathering wealth, Protestants, particularly Calvinists, seem possessed by the "capitalist spirit." Weber states that he intends to examine the various religious doctrines of Protestantism to determine how the Protestant ethic encourages the "capitalist spirit."

Weber describes the capitalist spirit as the desire to constantly work and build greater and greater wealth, even when that wealth is not needed. He notes that that the capitalist spirit is not the same as capitalism itself, since it may exist in non-capitalist economies, and people not driven by endless profits may live within capitalist economies. Weber uses Benjamin Franklin's writings to illustrate this ethic, in which Franklin preaches astute financial advice with a moralistic tone, as if he were giving a sermon, and suggests that making money is one's moral duty. Though Franklin's contemporaries took his words as sound wisdom, Weber argues that society in the Middle Ages would have read Franklin's moralistic love of money as the worst form of greed. Weber contrasts the capitalist attitude, that money-making is one's moral duty, with "traditionalism," in which one simply works to make enough money to live, rather than to constantly grow a profit. In the capitalist spirit, one lives to work. In the traditionalist spirit, one works to live. To understand how work became life's central duty, Weber notes that one must look to the Protestant concept of the "calling."

The German Monk, Martin Luther, who initiated the Protestant Reformation, developed the idea of one's calling which is now ubiquitous in every Protestant tradition. Whereas Catholics believe one's occupation is morally neutral at best, and demonstrate their devotion by leading a monastic lifestyle, Luther rejected this monastic tradition since it removed the Christian from the world around them. Instead, Luther taught that one's secular occupation is their calling, their divine duty, since God providentially placed them in it; thus, the best way for the new Protestant to serve God is to simply work hard. Luther believed this idea is found in the Bible, but Weber argues that it ultimately began with Luther, since there was no concept like it before him. Although Luther's direct descendants, the Lutherans, directly opposed Calvinism, Weber argues that the French theologian John Calvin took Luther's loose conception of calling and made it what it is today.

Weber states that Calvinism's most important contribution to Protestant thought is its doctrine of predestination. According to this doctrine, human beings are unable to come to salvation on their own. Instead, God, in his providence, chose a small minority of humanity to save, even before the earth was created. Calvinists thus believe that they have no control over their own salvation, and can only hope that they are one of God's elect, chosen for salvation. Weber argues that this creates a deep insecurity and pessimistic individualism within Calvinists, since they are never entirely sure that they won't go to hell when they die. To rectify this insecurity, the Calvinists lean heavily into Luther's idea of calling, arguing that a true Christian—chosen by God for salvation—will manifest their divine status by living a studious and moral life. Under Luther's concept of the calling, this means that they labor tirelessly in their secular occupation to prove to themselves that they are saved. Calvinists are so intent on living this virtuous life that they shy away from any emotionalism and become rational and methodical in every aspect of life, which in turn makes them excellent workers and business owners.

Weber examines German Pietism and Methodism as well, but argues that neither possess Calvinism's extreme rationalism and logical consistency, nor are they as effective at compelling their followers to live lives of hard work and rigid virtuosity, with very little tolerance for personal pleasure. The Baptist sects, Weber describes, look much like Calvinism, but with the added belief that they cannot participate in politics or war, leaving business as their sole outlet for their energy and ambition, thus furthering the capitalist spirit within

Protestantism.

Weber argues that the final complement to Luther's calling is Protestantism's revised concept of asceticism. Where Catholics practiced ascetic lives in the traditional, monastic way by forgoing personal possessions, Protestantism inherited Luther's utter rejection of any form of monasticism. Instead, as modeled by the English Puritans under Richard Baxter, Protestants came to view wealth as permissible but luxury as sinful: a Christian can earn as much as they want—they are even morally compelled to do so—as long as that wealth does not lead to idleness or spurious "enjoyment of life." Rather than the quiet, contemplative asceticism that Catholics practice, Protestant asceticism is defined by constant labor in one's calling. In order to explain this concept, Weber uses the example of **The Pilgrim's Progress**, a Puritan allegory in which a man seeks his own salvation to the detriment of his family—a pursuit that is characterized as righteous rather than selfish. As such, Weber argues that Protestantism's emphasis on personal salvation further encourages the capitalist spirit among its adherents, while simultaneously freeing them from any moral scruples about amassing wealth. Weber argues that it also pushes them away from experiencing pleasure in life, and as such, Protestants developed a sparse and colorless culture compared to their forefathers in history.

Weber recognizes that in the modern era, religion is losing much of its former influence. However, he firmly believes that Protestant theology effectively built the modern capitalist system into the dominant power it is today, and thus every person on earth is permanently shaped by Protestant thinking, whether they themselves are religious or not.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Max Weber – The author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In it, Weber examines religion as a primarily social force, one that is largely responsible for developing non-religious aspects of society—in particular, the capitalist spirit that permeates Europe and America. He highlights how Martin Luther's concept of the Christian's "calling"—the idea that one must do, to the best of their ability, whatever work God has placed before them—actually led to the rise of the capitalist spirit. This is because, Weber explains, Luther's idea of the Christian calling shifted work from being a secondary part of life to a primary one—a God-given "moral responsibility" that requires one's full attention and effort. This shift consequently lead to an idealization of money-making, as well as classicism and economic inequality. Weber also credits John Calvin's concept of predestination for giving rise to the capitalist spirit, noting how predestination hinges on an "austere," "methodical," and individualistic approach to life that is also conducive to capitalist enterprise. The third contributor of the capitalist spirit that Weber outlines is the distinctly Puritan form of asceticism, which emphasizes the value of hard work, saving, and investment (rather than entirely avoiding wealth and possessions, like Catholicism's monastic asceticism).

Martin Luther – A German monk who initiated the Protestant Reformation, and the father of Lutheranism. Although once a Catholic himself, Luther rebelled against the Catholic Church's mediation between individual Christians and God. Most importantly for Weber's work, Luther rejected the Catholic concept of monastic asceticism, since it removed the Christian from the world God made. Instead, Luther developed the concept of the calling, which posits that one's secular occupation is also their divine duty, since God providentially placed them in that position. Thus, the premier way for a person to serve God is to work hard in their occupation.

John Calvin – A French theologian who helped lead the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland, and the father of Calvinism. Calvin developed the doctrine of predestination, that teaches that God elected which human beings will be saved and which will be damned before he created the earth. This means that no one can control their own salvation, but must simply hope that they are among God's elect. Weber argues that this creates a deep insecurity within Calvinists, since they never know if they are saved or damned. To address this insecurity, Calvinists take Luther's idea of the Christian's calling to its extreme, tirelessly working in their secular occupation to prove to themselves that they number among the saved, as evidenced by their virtuous hard work.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Richard Baxter – A pastor and writer and a representative of English Puritanism. Weber uses Baxter to demonstrate the Puritan view of asceticism, which holds that wealth itself is not evil, but the idleness that results from enjoying one's wealth is.

Benjamin Franklin – One of the American Founding Fathers. Weber uses Franklin to demonstrate the capitalist spirit by including an excerpt from one of Franklin's writings, in which he gives simple economic advice dressed in moralistic language, like a sermon, and describes making profit as a person's ethical responsibility.

TERMS

Asceticism – Asceticism is the practice of living a virtuous, disciplined life by abstaining from worldly pleasures. Catholic monks practice monastic asceticism, forgoing earthly possessions, money, and a career to pray and care for the poor. Protestants, and particularly Puritans, reinterpreted asceticism by claiming that wealth and possessions are permissible, even the sign of God's favor, and one demonstrates their asceticism

simply by not enjoying their wealth or spending it on luxuries.

Baptists – A denomination within Protestantism that later spawned the Mennonites and the Quakers. Early Baptists believed themselves to be members of the only "true church," an exclusivity than led them to shun the outside world and deem it idolatrous.

Calling – The Protestant concept of the "calling" refers to one's secular occupation and argues that the premiere way for one to serve God is by laboring in the work God assigned to them. **Martin Luther** developed the idea of the Christian's calling as a response to Catholic monasticism, but it was eventually adopted by every Protestant tradition. Calvinism elaborated on the idea by arguing that faithful labor in one's calling was the primary mark of salvation.

Calvinism – Calvinism is the body of doctrines that **John Calvin** developed during the Protestant Reformation, the most notable of which is the doctrine of predestination.

Capitalist Spirit – The capitalist spirit describes the attitude that work and profit is an end in itself, and that one must devote all of their hours and energy to their occupation. **Weber** distinguishes the capitalist spirit as the motivating force behind the capitalist economic system.

Catholicism – Catholicism is the largest unified movement in Christianity. Although there are some divisions within the Catholic Church, they are far fewer than the divisions in Protestantism. **Weber** treats Catholicism as a unified movement for the sake of his argument.

Elect – The elect are those destined for salvation according to **Calvin**'s doctrine of predestination.

Lutheranism – Lutheranism is the body of doctrines that developed out of **Martin Luther**'s writing and teaching during the Protestant Reformation. Although Lutheranism developed at the same time as Calvinism, Lutheranism rejects predestination and historically opposed Calvinism's influence.

Mennonites – The Mennonites are a Protestant movement that abstains from public office, military service, or formal religious organization.

Methodism – Methodism is a movement that descended from Calvinism and the teachings of John Wesley. Despite its heritage, Methodism is less militaristic than Calvinism and rejects the idea of predestination.

Pietism – Pietism is a movement that rose out of the Lutheran denomination in the 17th century and placed a much greater emphasis on personal piety and self-discipline.

Predestination – Predestination is the Calvinist doctrine that humanity is completely wretched and separated from God, and thus cannot earn their own salvation. Instead, God divinely chose a minority of humanity to save, long before the earth was created, and the rest of humanity is damned to hell. Those who are saved are known as the elect.

Presbyterianism – Presbyterianism is a subsequent development of Calvinism that originated in England and Scotland.

Protestant Reformation – The Protestant Reformation was a religious upheaval that spread through Europe in the 16th century, initiated by **Martin Luther**'s criticisms of Catholic doctrine. The Protestant Reformation had wide-reaching political, intellectual, and cultural effects, most notably that it divided formerly Catholic Europe into various competing Protestant sects and denominations.

Protestantism – Protestantism is a movement within Christianity that rejects the Catholic Church's authority. Protestantism emerged during the Protestant Reformation, when the German monk **Martin Luther** began criticizing Catholic doctrine and practice. There are many denominations within Protestantism

Puritanism – Although Puritanism occasionally refers to the early Protestant movement as a whole, it specifically refers to the English Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries who sought to further reform the Church of England. English Puritanism is descended from Calvinism, and shares most of its same beliefs.

Quakerism – The Quakers (also known as the Religious Society of Friends) are a religious group descended from Calvinism. Quakerism was popular in early America.

Traditionalism – The antithesis of the capitalist spirit. Traditionalism is an economic viewpoint that centers around minimizing work and maximizing pleasure and leisure time—in other words, working enough to satisfy one's needs but not attempting to accrue more and more wealth for the sake of it.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RELIGION AND THE "CAPITALIST SPIRIT"

Max Weber, famed German sociologist, spent much of his professional life arguing that organized religion plays a dominant role in shaping society. In his 1905 work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he traces the connection between Protestant theology—especially that of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Richard Baxter—and the development of the "capitalist spirit," the individualistic compulsion to work and profit and grow, even when one's financial needs do not demand it. Weber notes that the capitalist spirit is different than capitalism itself; many

people may live in capitalist economies, yet do not devote their entire lives to work and profit, and thus are not compelled by the capitalist spirit. In what is widely regarded as one of the most significant sociological pieces ever written, Weber argues that Protestant theology is primarily (though not entirely) responsible for developing the capitalist spirit across Europe and America, demonstrating that religion plays a formative role in non-religious aspects of society.

Weber observes that, in the 300 years since the Protestant Reformation, Protestants have occupied far more business leadership and skilled labor roles than non-Protestant Christians within the same communities, indicating that their differing religious views tangibly impact the non-religious aspects of their lives. According to Weber, in every European and American country with multiple Christian denominations, Protestants inevitably rise to the highest positions of leadership, wealth, and expertise. He notes that this "social stratification" has become a subject of great concern for many Catholic communities, as they fall behind economically and thus wield less influence in society. This stratification parallels differing temperaments between Catholics and Protestants, even within the same nationalities and communities. Weber quotes, "The Catholic… is more calm; his acquisitive drive is lower" than the Protestant. Playing upon the common expression, "either eat well or sleep soundly," Weber suggests that the Catholic chooses to "sleep soundly," while the Protestant strives to "eat well." Catholics favor the peaceful, "subsistent" life; Protestants favor the successful, "acquisitive" life. The characteristic differences between denominations seems to imply that their religious views also shape temperament and economic outcomes.

Weber argues that Protestants' success in capitalist enterprise originates in their theology's relatively new (compared to Catholic theology's) ideas about work and salvation, thus modeling how people's religious beliefs shape their personal ethics, even around non-religious subjects such as economics. Weber posits that the greatest driver of Protestantism's capitalist spirit is the belief that God made human beings to work. This concept of work as a divine duty—which Protestants refer to as their "calling"—is foreign to Catholicism, originating with the German monk Martin Luther, who led the Protestant Reformation in Germany, where Protestantism originated as a protest against Catholicism. Contrasting with the Catholic belief that one serves God in church or by entering the clergy, Protestants believe they glorify God by simply laboring in their occupations to the utmost of their ability. According to Weber, this shifts the Protestant paradigm about the nature of work itself. Under this new concept, Protestants' work becomes the end rather than the means—instead of working to live, they live to work. As Weber goes on to show, this religiously motivated belief makes them ideal capitalists, since they orient their lives around labor and profit, thus demonstrating the connection between religious ideology and real-world implications.

Weber further posits that Protestants' belief that hard work is evidence of a righteous life makes them "austere" and "serious," far more "methodical" in their lifestyles than their Catholic neighbors. He recalls that many Protestant leaders advise their followers to keep daily journals "in which sins, temptations, and progress made […] [are] continuously recorded," so that they can better monitor and organize their own behavior. Weber argues that this, too, lends to the Protestants' formidable capitalist spirit, since not only do they work ceaselessly, but they also approach their work (and their spirituality) analytically, making them ideal employees and even better managers and investors, keen to continuously scale their skills and profits to larger degrees. Protestant theology thus values ambition and discipline, which in turn makes Protestants fierce capitalists; their tangible economic outcomes are driven by intangible religious ideals.

Weber notes that after three centuries, Protestantism's capitalist spirit endures in many non-religious people, and thus exerts such significant influence on society that it structures the lives of the non-religious as well. In the founding years of the United States—a country "where capitalism is at its most unbridled"—Protestant theology undergirded American society since most citizens were Puritans, Baptists, or Methodists—all Protestant denominations. Because of this, Weber argues that their Protestant capitalist spirit is interwoven throughout American society. Even hundreds of years later, the country's "imagination" is "focused on sheer size," on creating profit at massive scale. American businessmen are publicly revered. However, Weber also notes that "the kind of people who are inspired by the 'capitalist spirit' today tend to be, if not exactly hostile to the Church, then at least indifferent." This asserts that religion, particularly Protestant Christianity, has such a powerfully formative impact that it shapes entire countries, even for those citizens who've shed their religious heritage.

Weber remains largely neutral while analyzing how Protestant religion shapes Western society. However, he describes the capitalist spirit as an "irrational […] way of conducting one's life, whereby a man exists for his business, not vice versa," indicating that he bemoans the spread of obsession with work and profit.

THE PROTESTANT CALLING

In the 1500s, German Catholic monk Martin Luther began challenging the Catholic Church on its teachings about salvation and serving God, which initiated the Protestant Reformation and marked the beginning of Protestantism's spread across Europe. Among other things, Luther fiercely criticized the Catholic monastic tradition—which, as a monk, he participated in—that separated those who wanted to serve God from the secular, non-religious world. As a result, Luther developed his concept of the Christian's "calling," which states that the best way for one to

serve God is to simply do whatever work God placed before them to the utmost of their ability. This concept of calling became a staple of Protestant theology, present in nearly every Protestant denomination, validating any and all lawful occupations as divine work when performed by faithful Christians. As such, sociologist Max Weber argues that Luther's new concept of the calling contributed to the rise of the "capitalist spirit" by moving work from a secondary aspect of life to the divinely mandated "moral responsibility." This, in turn, encouraged an idealization of money-making and brought about classicism and economic inequality.

Weber describes that Luther rejected Catholic monasticism as egoistic and "completely worthless," since it does not actively participate in the world around it. In Luther's Catholic tradition, the most religiously devout people became monks or nuns, separating themselves from the outer world by living in a monastery to reflect, privately serve God, and care for the poor. Luther himself lived as a monk for many years. However, as Luther separated from the Catholic Church, he began to see the monastic tradition as "completely worthless" and a "manifestation of unloving egoism and abdication from secular duties." He reasoned that separating oneself from the world and the people that God made does not honor God, but instead spurns his creation. Contrasting with the Protestantism Luther soon brought to life, Weber suggests that monasticism contributed to Catholicism's decidedly un-capitalist position, since it discourages the faithful from gathering earthly positions or participating in the competitive marketplace. Luther broke from tradition by deciding that such removal from the world is effectively "evil," a rejection of God's earth.

As Luther pushed further away from monasticism, he developed his concept of humanity's "calling" that argues that all work pleases God, which Weber suggests became the foundation of the Protestant idealization of work and labor. Rather than hiding away in a monastery, Luther eventually preached that "labor in a secular calling appears as the outward expression of Christian charity," since "division of labor forces each individual to work for others." That is, participating in the world God made is the best way to serve and please him. Weber argues that, for Protestants, this shifts the role of one's occupation from simply a way to earn money and feed themselves to their divine duty, the reason God created them in the first place. "Economic activity is an end in itself," the primary means by which they serve God. Consequently, Weber argues that the "'productivity' of work in the capitalist sense of the word was given a powerful boost by this exclusive striving for the kingdom of God through fulfillment of the duty of labor as calling." That is, Protestants' religious fervor translated into economic success as well, since secular, for-profit work and spirituality became inextricably linked.

However, Weber argues that Luther's idea of a calling relies on the idea of God's sovereignty and thus establishes classism and inequality, which are also enablers of the capitalist spirit. As Luther develops his concept, he teaches that the "fulfillment of [earthly] duties is absolutely the only way to please God, [...] therefore every legitimate occupation is quite simply of equal value," because God sovereignly placed each person in their particular occupation. Weber argues that this furthers the shift away from Catholic monasticism, which emphasizes service to the poor. In pursuing their calling, Protestant Christians become less concerned with self-sacrifice and social good, and more focused on pursuing whatever profit-making work they may happen to have, since that is the "absolutely only way to please God." Additionally, wealthy Protestants have the "comforting assurance that unequal distribution of this world's goods was the special work of the providence of God," suggesting that wealth inequality is some part of God's divine plan. Business owners who are immensely wealthy while their neighbors starve can now "interpret[] the employer's money-making as a 'calling' too." Weber suggests this feeds into the capitalist spirit by freeing profit-makers from their scruples about the poor, traditional charity, or economic inequality, and justifying their focus on profit.

Although Weber attributes a significant aspect of the capitalist spirit, both good and bad, to Luther's concept of the calling, he is careful to point at that this never appears to be Luther's intention. (He notes that Luther even criticized capitalist mechanisms such as interest and usury.) Rather, Weber argues that the effects of Luther's calling are unintended "consequences of purely religious motives," realized long after his death.

CALVINISTIC PREDESTINATION

Though the German monk Martin Luther initiated the Protestant Reformation, French theologian John Calvin arguably played an equally significant role in early Protestantism. Living in Switzerland during the Reformation, John Calvin developed the set of doctrines known as Calvinism—most notably the doctrine of predestination, which states that all of humanity is utterly wretched and God simply chooses a small minority to grant salvation to, damning the rest as they deserve. Beyond Calvinism, this doctrine went on to influence many subsequent Protestant traditions, particularly the Puritans. In sociologist Max Weber's view, Calvinism's doctrine of predestination is "unique [and] of the utmost psychological efficacy," developing several traits crucial to the rise of the "capitalist spirit." Weber argues that Calvinism's doctrines play an outsized role in developing the modern capitalist spirit, especially through the doctrine of predestination which encourages an "austere," individualistic, and "methodical" approach to life, conducive to capitalist enterprise.

John Calvin's doctrine of predestination teaches Protestants that their salvation is never certain, that they are constantly

"being put to the test" by God, creating a deep insecurity within them and an obsession with their own performance. As Weber relates, Calvin's doctrine of predestination teaches that God decides which people are granted salvation and which people are damned, even before they ever exist. Unlike Catholicism or Lutheranism—where one can earn salvation through repentance—Calvinism teaches its followers that their salvation is completely beyond their control.

However, the doctrine also teaches that the "elect," those destined for salvation, will manifest their elected status by a virtuous life of "tireless labor." Weber argues that, for Calvinists, this uncertainty regarding their own salvation results in deep insecurity, because they can never be sure if they are going to heaven or hell. However, by committing themselves to unceasing work and carefully monitoring their own virtue, Calvinists can provide their own "self-assurance" that they must be among the elect, since their lives reflect what a Christian life should look like. Weber states that this results in the Calvinists—and the Puritans, who inherited the belief—constantly feeling as if they are "being put to the test" to prove their salvation to themselves and each other, based on how faithfully they labor through life. Weber suggests that this insecurity results in an obsession with work—sitting alongside Luther's concept of "calling"—and rigid virtuosity. While the Catholic can be lax in their daily life, since they can always repent and regain their good standing with God, the Calvinist approaches life and work with a severe rationality and an intensely "methodical" approach, even keeping journals to track their own spiritual and occupational progress. When Calvinists work and abstain from pleasures and emotions, they are not only being obedient to John Calvin's ideal of God—they are also proving that they are among God's elect and will be saved from hell, since good works are "indispensable as signs of election."

Along with obsession with performance, Weber argues that Calvinism's predestination creates a "tremendous inner loneliness" which results in the "pessimistically tinted individualism" that pervades the capitalist spirit. Calvinists believe that neither church nor community nor sacraments can bring salvation—only God's sovereign will can. Weber thus argues that Calvinists are each "obliged to tread his path alone, toward a destiny which had been decreed from all eternity." Weber states that this loneliness creates a strong-willed individualist mentality unique to Calvinist traditions, contrasting especially with Catholics, who believe that they stand united together before God. Weber finds this pessimistic individualism riddled throughout Puritan theology as well, since it descends directly from Calvinism. In the famous Puritan allegory, **The Pilgrim's Progress**, the main character, Christian, lives in the City of Destruction (symbolizing damnation) with his wife and children. However, he feels compelled to go to the Celestial City (symbolizing salvation). Leaving his crying wife and children behind him, Christian puts his fingers in his ears and shouts, "Life, eternal life," and runs away from them, not even considering their safety or well-being until he himself is safe in the Celestial City. Weber states that this story perfectly articulates "the mood of the Puritan [or Calvinist] believer who was basically only concerned with himself, and had thoughts only for his own salvation," suggesting a selfish level of individualism in the belief system. Weber notes that Catholics tend to oppose the "striving after material gain which exceeded one's own needs," since it "only seemed possible at the expense of others, and must therefore necessarily be regarded as reprehensible." However, his analysis of Calvinist individualism suggests that concern for others is largely eliminated through Calvinist thinking. Striving after gains, even at other's expense, is no longer "reprehensible," since the only people Calvinists must answer for is themselves.

Weber argues that Calvinism's obsession with performance and pessimistic individualism are significant contributors to the development of the capitalist ethos, since succeeding in a capitalist economy requires ceaseless and methodical effort, as well as a certain level of apathy toward other people. These traits moved through Calvinism into subsequent traditions, such as the Presbyterians and especially the English Puritans, who shaped early American culture and fostered its intensely capitalistic national attitude. Overall, Weber is not kind to Calvinism and its doctrine of predestination, describing what he calls "the pathos of its inhumanity." Nevertheless, he recognizes Calvinism as uniquely "logically consistent," which explains its influence in Protestantism and its dominant role in developing the capitalist ethos.

PURITAN ASCETICISM

Sociologist Max Weber posits that the third major contributor to Protestantism's "capitalist spirit" is the development of a new form of asceticism, or self-discipline and avoidance of any form of indulgence. Since Martin Luther rejected Catholicism's monastic asceticism—where monks remove themselves from worldly pleasures by living in secluded monasteries—a new concept of asceticism needed to take its place, one that did not frown upon Protestant work or wealth. Weber suggests that no group developed this new asceticism as well as the English Puritans, who embrace the ideals of both Martin Luther and John Calvin. By examining English Puritan asceticism, Weber argues that Protestantism produced a concept of asceticism that enabled them to dominate as capitalists and created the modern middle-class, yet also eliminated much of the vibrancy from Western culture.

Building on Luther's concept of the Protestant "calling" and Calvinism's belief that hard work is the only evidence of salvation, the Puritans adapted the concept of asceticism to encourage hard work, saving, and investment. Weber posits that since the Puritans cannot use the traditional model of

asceticism—which demands forgoing wealth and possessions—they change it. To this end, Puritan theologian Richard Baxter taught that "idleness," rather than wealth, is the true sin. He writes that men must work "as long as it is day," and "only action, not idleness and indulgence, […] serves to increase [God's] glory." Within this paradigm, wealth is only sinful if one stops to enjoy it, thereby embracing leisure rather than glorifying God by working. Weber notes that because idleness is a sin, even the wealthy are expected to work regardless of whether they need the money. When the Puritans amass wealth but are not allowed to spend it on any form of sinful luxury (which would be considered idleness), the only due course is either for them to save it or reinvest it in their own businesses. Both of these actions are conducive to the capitalist spirit and allow people to grow their wealth even more. Weber argues that Puritan asceticism thus opposes "enjoyment" and "consumption" while further "liberating the acquisition of wealth from the inhibitions of traditionalist ethics," making them ideal capitalists, since they only spend money to make more money.

Weber notes that Puritan leaders like Baxter also preach their hyper-productive brand of asceticism as a way to avoid sin and sensuality, which makes them culturally dry but efficient workers. Baxter writes that asceticism, being constant work, helps people avoid sensuality and "instinctual enjoyment of life," which again denotes leisure and which the Puritans regard as sinful. Weber suggests that this becomes yet another way in which Puritan asceticism reinforces the value of "hard, constant, physical or mental work." To avoid sexual temptation in particular, Baxter advises his followers to "Work hard in your calling." However, Weber states that the Puritans' aversion to sensuality or pleasure make them dour, almost culture-less people. He notes that Puritans detest artistic expression such as theater or fashion, leaning instead toward "conformity" in all things and promoting "plain utility." In Weber's view, this makes the Puritans even more suited to capitalist endeavors, since uniformity and standardization in business encourage productivity and dependable profits.

Weber ultimately argues that Puritan asceticism established the middle class—the height of capitalist enterprise since it eliminated the distinction between nobility and peasantry—though this comes at the cost of the loss of culture and the rise of materialism. According to Weber, Puritan asceticism's constant and dependable creation of wealth "always benefited the tendency toward a middle-class, economically rational conduct of life." However, with this heightened rationalism and resistance toward artistic expression or truly enjoying one's life comes a loss of vibrant culture. Weber refers to the German writer Goethe's mourning of this loss, saying that the growth of Puritan asceticism and their capitalist spirit signaled a "resigned farewell to a period of full and fine humanity, the likes of which we shall not see again."

Additionally, although Puritan asceticism tries to ward off materialism, Weber argues that it ironically brought about the greatest materialist age in human history. He states, "As asceticism began to change the world and endeavored to exercise its influence over it, the outward goods of the world gained increasing and finally inescapable power over men, as never before in history." Weber thus argues that Puritan asceticism, as a major contributor to Protestantism's capitalist spirit, created an intensely anti-ascetic world driven entirely by profit, growth, and material wealth.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Weber uses John Bunyan's religious allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, to represent the selfish bent of Puritan theology. In the 1678 Puritan allegory, the main character, Christian, lives in the City of Destruction with his wife and children, symbolizing his own state of damnation. However, Christian decides he must go to the Celestial City, representing salvation. Heedless of his responsibility to his family, Christian ignores the cries of his wife and children and runs toward the Celestial City, shouting about "eternal life," leaving his family to face their own ruin. Weber argues that Christian's prioritization of his own salvation over his family's welfare, which Bunyan depicts as noble and righteous, accurately reflects the selfish individualism of Puritan theology as a whole. As the Puritans see it, each man's sole concern should be his personal salvation, rather than the welfare of his family or community. Since one proves his personal salvation through laboring in his calling, Weber argues that this selfish bent ultimately fuels the capitalist spirit. Just as Christian selfishly focuses on his own spiritual wellbeing, Puritan people feel justified in focusing on their own economic success, which they believe pleases God, even when their neighbors may be destitute. As symbolized by Christian's selfishness—which the allegory depicts as righteousness—Weber argues that Puritan theology justifies one's pursuit of personal gain, even at the expense of the social good.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: and Other Writings* published in 2002.

Part 1, Section 1 Quotes

❝ Business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the skilled higher strata of the labor force, and especially the higher technical or commercially trained staff of modern enterprises tend to be predominantly Protestant.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

Weber opens his essay by establishing the fundamental question he wants to answer, which is how Protestants have become so economically dominant in the three centuries since the Protestant Reformation. This economic disparity between Protestants and Catholics leads Weber to his belief that some aspect of Protestant theology must fuel the capitalist spirit. The disparity between the two denominations is particularly notable since most European countries contain a mixture of the two groups. Furthermore, at the time of Weber's writing, Protestantism has only existed for three centuries while Catholicism is over 1,000 years old. This suggests that not only is Protestantism less socially entrenched, but whatever change its theology brought about in its early adherents was remarkably swift, creating a tangible change in economic outcomes within the first few generations.

❝ "The Catholic…is more calm; his acquisitive drive is lower, he places more value on a life which is as secure as possible, even if this should be on a smaller income, than on a perilous, exciting life, which could bring honor and riches."

Related Characters: Max Weber

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Weber quotes a writer who describes the Catholic ideal of life as quiet, slow, and secure, rather than fast-paced and profit-driven as the Protestants live. Weber uses these characteristic distinctions to argue that denominational beliefs lead to entirely different views of life. It is notable that both Catholicism and Protestantism are Christian traditions: they believe in the same God, the same origin of the universe, read from the same holy book, and so on. That two branches of the same religion, even in the same countries, could produce such distinctly different worldviews reiterates how powerfully formative religion is on a person's understanding of their place in the world, which thus guides their everyday life. Catholicism's emphasis on security and a peaceful life suggests that, by nature, Catholics are more contented to simply exist in the world, accept their lot, and enjoy life, while Protestants are intent on constantly rising in wealth and influence.

Part 1, Section 2 Quotes

❝ A way of thinking like that of Benjamin Franklin was applauded by an entire nation. But in ancient medieval times it would have been denounced as an expression of the most filthy avarice and of an absolutely contemptible attitude.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker), Benjamin Franklin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Weber uses a moralistic lecture from Benjamin Franklin to illustrate what he means by the "spirit" of capitalism as opposed to capitalism as an economic system. Franklin's lecture presents plain financial advice as if it were religious wisdom, inferring that saving and making money is one's moral duty. Franklin's view of wealth-making as an ethical responsibility indicates a massive shift in society's view of money and greed, especially within Christian cultures. Whereas Catholicism and even Jesus's teachings counsel against striving for wealth or valuing material gains, Protestantism sees the accrual of wealth as a sort of moral duty. This suggests that Protestant theology manages to subvert the biblical and traditionalist views of wealth and greed, while still believing that it embodies the biblical virtues. Since Weber never presents Protestantism as willfully deceptive, it seems that this powerful shift in values arises organically out of Protestantism's doctrinal developments.

❝ The extra money appealed to [the worker] less than the reduction in work; he did not ask: How much can I earn in a day if I do the maximum possible amount of work in a day? But: How much must I work in order to earn the same amount […] that I used to earn and which covers my *traditional* needs?

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

To explain what he means by economic traditionalism, Weber uses the illustration of a farm worker whose employer tries to entice him to work longer hours by offering higher wages. Instead, the traditionalist responds by working fewer hours to make the same amount of money he always has. Weber contrasts the capitalist spirit, which drives one to maximize their profits at all times, with the traditionalist spirit, which drives one to minimize the time spent working so they can enjoy the rest of their lives. The differing responses to profit and leisure suggests that the capitalist individual views work as an end in itself, its own reward, while the traditionalist individual views work only as the means to an end, the way to earn enough income to live as they please. The rise of the capitalist spirit in society thus implies an entire reshaping of that society as well. Where a traditionalist society places more value on the enjoyment of life and the things that enrich it, such as art or music or family relationships, the capitalist society primarily values only what is produced, meaning what profits are generated or what products are built.

> The kind of people who are inspired by the "capitalist spirit" today tend to be, if not exactly hostile to the Church, then at least indifferent. The prospect of "holy tedium" of paradise holds few attractions for their active nature; for them, religion is simply something that stops people from working here on earth.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Weber states that the chief capitalists of the modern era have shed their religious influences, yet retain the capitalist spirit that Protestantism helped to foster. This suggests that Protestantism's influence reaches beyond its own religious tradition and dogma, but leaves the greatest impact on society by helping to develop the modern capitalist environment. With this, Weber highlights that Protestantism, or any organized religion, plays a powerfully formative role within society. Not only does Protestantism preside over its followers' lives, it also exerts significant influence on those people who have no interest in Christianity whatsoever, as it shapes the economic attitudes of large portions of the world.

Part 1, Section 3 Quotes

> The monastic style of life is now not only completely worthless as a means of justification before God (that much is self-evident), [Luther] also sees it as a manifestation *unloving* egoism and an abdication from secular duties. In contrast, labor in a secular calling appears as the outward expression of Christian charity.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker), Martin Luther

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Weber describes Martin Luther's move away from Catholic asceticism, which leads him to form his concept of the calling, that argues that one best serves God by simply laboring in their own secular occupation. Luther's rejection of the monastic ascetic lifestyle is significant since he himself was part of the tradition, living for many years as a German monk. Luther's rejection of monastic asceticism, which teaches that Christians should withhold themselves from worldly pleasures and secular pursuits, effectively inverts the Catholic view of the world. Whereas Catholics believe that certain aspects of life are sacred (i.e., the sacraments and church conduct), while the rest of life is secular (i.e., one's daily labor), Luther's idea of the calling eliminates any real distinction between sacred and secular. Since "labor in a secular calling" is the Christian's new duty, that daily labor itself becomes as sacred, or pleasing to God, as any church practice.

> The salvation of souls and this alone is at the heart of [Protestants'] life and work. Their ethical goals and the practical effects of their teaching are all anchored firmly here and are the consequences of purely religious motives. And we shall therefore have to be prepared for the cultural effects of the Reformation to be in large measure [...] unforeseen and unwished for.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker), John Calvin,

Martin Luther

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Although Weber's entire essay examines the role of Protestant theology in developing the capitalist spirit, he clarifies that he believes this to be an entirely unintended consequence of Luther and Calvin's respective religious ideals. Weber even later claims that Luther was antagonistic towards early forms of the capitalist spirit. Luther and Calvin's ideas continued to evolve long after their deaths, furthering the capitalist bent of Protestantism. The ability of purely religious ideas to outlive their own progenitors and affect massive unforeseen changes in society suggests that such ideas are powerful, and perhaps even dangerous. Particularly for people like Luther, who it seems would have opposed the rising capitalist spirit had he lived to see it, this presents a warning against handling and changing religious ideals too lightly, as new ideas tend to spread beyond their original reach and intent.

Part 2, Section 1 Quotes

This doctrine [of predestination], with all the pathos of its inhumanity, had one principal consequence for the mood of a generation which yielded to its magnificent logic: it engendered, *for each individual*, a feeling of tremendous inner *loneliness*.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Under the doctrine of predestination, Calvinism teaches that each person has no control over their own salvation or damnation, but must simply hope that God has chosen them for salvation and live as if this is indeed the case. Weber argues that this understanding of salvation removes any sense of solidarity from Christian practice. Whereas Catholicism holds that humanity stands before God collectively—though each person is still responsible for their individual actions—Calvinism's doctrines imply that no one else can help a person attain salvation. The consequence of this existential loneliness, aside from a particularly bleak disposition, seems to be the individualistic attitude that Weber later attributes to Calvinist thought, which arguably intensifies the capitalist spirit. A true capitalist needs to be not only committed to their work, but unheeding of the people around them, who either simply have less money than the eager capitalist, or whom the capitalist's strategies actively exploit. This ironically suggests, then, that Calvinism develops the capitalist spirit by making Christians less mindful of other people and less inclined to help them, instead focusing all of their energy on their own labors.

Tireless labor in a calling was urged as the best possible means of *attaining* this self-assurance. This and this alone would drive away religious doubt and give assurance of one's state of grace.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker), Martin Luther

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77-78

Explanation and Analysis

Weber states that Calvinism's doctrine of predestination produces a deep-seated insecurity in its adherents about their own salvation. As a result, Calvinists try to prove their elected status to themselves by taking the concept of the calling to an extreme, obsessively working so as to please God and demonstrate their reformed nature. The Calvinists' deep-seated insecurity rises from a purely religious question, yet creates a tangible outcome. This demonstrates religion's ability to not only shape a person's inner emotional life, but also their outward practical life. Calvinism takes Luther's idea of the calling further than Luther by making one's secular labor effectively the means and sign of their salvation. In pushing Luther's ideology perhaps further than Luther intended, Calvinism demonstrates the unintended consequences religious ideas often have as they move through societies, since one person's idea can be adopted, altered, and built upon by another to produce a radically different result.

The consequence of this systematization of the ethical conduct of life, which was enforced by Calvinism (unlike Lutheranism), is the permeation of the whole of existence by Christianity.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Weber observes that under Calvinism and its doctrine of predestination, the standard Christian becomes so obsessed with proving to themselves that they are saved that they learn to rigidly control and discipline each aspect of their life. This "permeation" of a person's entire life by their Christian insecurities again differs from Catholicism, which mainly governs the sacred aspects of life, and leaves individuals to go about the rest of their lives and work as they see fit. By contrast, Calvinism's level of influence and control over life seems nearly authoritarian. However, the difference between Catholic and Calvinist practice is rooted only in their theological distinctions. That purely religious ideas can result in entirely different lifestyles once again argues that religious ideas are among the most formative influences on society, causing massive changes in practical daily life, even as the consequence of purely metaphysical beliefs, like whether or not one has been predestined for heaven or hell.

> Lutheranism, as a result of its doctrine of grace, simply failed to provide the psychological drive to be systematic in the conduct of life, and thus to enforce the rationalization of life.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

In Weber's view, Lutheranism's rejection of predestination and belief that salvation can be gained easily through repentance are too forgiving to create militaristic rationalization like Calvinism does. While Weber phrases this as a condemnation, this is only in light of searching for the connection between Protestant theology and the capitalist spirit. On the whole, Weber describes Lutheranism as a much less severe and constraining environment to live in than what Calvinism creates; his own country, Germany, is steeped in Lutheran tradition. The fact that the less severe and militaristic an ideology is, the less conducive it is to capitalist enterprise seems to condemn the capitalist spirit. If a true capitalist can only be grown within a lifeless, unforgiving religious environment as Weber implies, then perhaps the capitalist spirit is not actually a beneficial attitude for human society.

> For the Baptists sects the intensity of their interest in the economic aspects of the calling was considerably *increased* by various factors. One of these was the refusal to accept state office, which was originally regarded as a religious duty deriving from rejection of the world [...] and the strict refusal to bear arms and swear on oath disqualified them from public office.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker), Martin Luther

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Weber states that the Baptists refuse to participate in politics or war, leaving business as their only option to pursue their own ambitions. While this increases their commitment to the capitalist spirit, the Baptists' refusal to participate in public service seems to run contrary to Luther's idea for the calling. Luther's hope was that the calling would move Christians to participate in society and work with and amongst all the people God created. The Baptists' rejection of politics and war ironically bars them from participating in occupations that outwardly serve other people or directly benefit society. While participating in civic leadership would serve others by helping society to run smoothly, and participating in war would serve others by protecting their homelands, the Baptists focus solely on business, which is self-serving. With this, Weber implies that the Baptists rejection of their surrounding culture and all that is "worldly" inevitably makes them more self-centered people.

> This ascetic style of life, however, as we have seen, meant a *rational* shaping of one's whole existence in obedience to God's will. And this asceticism was no longer [merely good], but could be expected of everyone wanting to be sure of salvation. This *rationalization* of the conduct of life in the world with a view to the beyond is the *idea of calling* characteristic of ascetic Protestantism.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

Weber states that fear of God's judgment and commitment to one's calling effectively forces asceticism on every faithful Protestant, causing them to carefully monitor and order each aspect of their life. Notably, this concept of asceticism goes well beyond Catholicism's monastic understanding of asceticism. Although Catholics teach the value of an ascetic life, they do not demand that anyone adopt that lifestyle. Those who do, such as monks, are highly regarded but not elevated above anyone else. Protestantism's demand that each person lead an ascetic lifestyle in order to be saved thus represents another massive shift in Christian theology. Since their model of asceticism conveniently lines up with the capitalist spirit and gathering wealth, this creates an unsettling relationship between making money and personal salvation, which runs counter to both Catholicism and Jesus's attitude towards money—Christ even advocated that personal riches were the greatest obstacle to a person's salvation.

> Now [asceticism] would enter the market place of life, slamming the doors on the monastery behind it, and set about permeating precisely this secular everyday life with its methodical approach, turning it toward a rational life *in* the world, but neither *of* this world nor *for* it.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Weber states that Protestantism transforms the concept of an ascetic life by moving it out of the monastery and into the realm of daily life, amongst the masses of people. However, Protestant asceticism's commitment to being "in" the world but not "of" it also seems to subvert that Catholic motivation behind asceticism. Where Catholic monks lived in a monastery and removed themselves from worldly concerns such as where to live, how to make their money, and in what career, these same monks also shared the world's concerns by using their freedom to care for the poor and downcast, as is seen in the lives of many venerated saints. Protestant asceticism, by contrast, concerns itself only with where to live, what occupation to take, and how to pay for one's daily needs. Its commitment to being in the world but not "for" it removes Protestants from the social concerns of their communities. Unlike Catholics, Weber argues, Protestants are not using their ascetic freedom to care for the downcast or destitute, but seemingly to block them out. While this may not be true of all Protestants, the shift in the ascetic lifestyle seems to turn Christians away from working for social good, angling their lives inward instead.

Part 2, Section 2 Quotes

> What is really reprehensible is resting on one's possessions, enjoyment of wealth with its consequences of idleness and the lusts of the flesh, and particularly distraction from striving for a "holy" life. And it is only because possessions bring with them the danger of this resting that they are dubious. [...] according to god's unambiguously revealed will, it is only action, not idleness and indulgence, that serves to increase his glory. Wasting time is therefore the most serious of all sins.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker), Richard Baxter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Weber states that, in Puritan theologian Richard Baxter's view, wealth itself is not the true evil—which, for Catholics, encourages ascetic poverty—but only the *enjoyment* of wealth and luxury that is evil, since that enjoyment means one is not spending all of their hours and energy working in a calling. This obsession with hard work and avoiding any form of idleness or leisure also represents a clear shift away from monastic asceticism, which holds that meditation and rest are productive in themselves, since such practice leads to a more contemplative life. Although Baxter's view of sin and virtue invariably leads to more productive people, compelled by the capitalist spirit to endlessly work, the rejection of leisure suggests that the ascetic Protestant is a far less enjoyable person, unwilling to take pleasure in simple life or share that pleasure with others. This fits in with Weber's oft-mentioned ideal that the capitalist life is antithetical to a happy life, since work becomes the only thing that matters at the expense of leisure, relationships, and simple pleasures.

Above and beyond this, however, work is the end purpose of life commanded by God. The Pauline principle "He who will not work, shall not eat," applies absolutely and to everyone. Unwillingness to work is a symptom of the absence of the state of grace.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker), Richard Baxter

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

Weber argues that the logical extension of Baxter's theology is that work equals salvation, and idleness is thus the sign that a person is damned. Although Baxter himself is remembered as a gentle man, the implications of his view of work and salvation are exceptionally dark, effectively arguing that anyone who is lazy or does not want to spend every hour of their life in labor will go to hell. This argument is a powerful motivator of the capitalist spirit, since it reinforces the capitalist ideal of an unceasing laborer with the formidable threat of eternal torment. Thus, under Puritan theology, every person must be a dedicated capitalist or they will be damned. Though grim, Baxter's theology illustrates just how powerfully religious ideals can shape a person's everyday life. While the threat of hell is not religiously tied to one's secular occupation, work and salvation or damnation become inextricably linked because of the concepts of the calling and asceticism.

To want to be poor, it was often argued, was the same as wanting to be ill; it was to be condemned as seeking justification [salvation] by works, detrimental to the glory of God. Most of all, begging by one who is capable of work is not only sinful sloth, but is also […] contrary to charity.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

Weber explains that within Puritan asceticism, voluntary poverty or wishing for a simpler life is itself a sinful action that detracted from God's glory. This new form of asceticism not only encourages the capitalist spirit, but also defies Catholic monastic asceticism. In the monastic tradition, voluntary poverty was a common practice to help monks identify with the poor and depend on God's mercy. Their poverty oriented them towards social good by reducing their dependence on material goods. The idea that Puritan asceticism views voluntary poverty not only as misguided, but even an insult to God, demonstrates how radically Protestantism reorients Christianity's aim and ideals. The ascetic Protestant not only rejects poverty and those who suffer it, but even see it as a sinful state, an insult to God and marker of poor moral character.

If we may sum up what has been said so far, then, innerworldly Protestant asceticism works with all it force against the uninhibited enjoyment of possessions; it discourages consumption, especially the consumption of luxuries. Conversely, it has the effect of liberating the acquisition of wealth from the inhibitions of traditionalist ethics; it breaks the fetters on the striving for gain by not only legalizing it, but […] seeing it as directly willed by God.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker), John Calvin, Martin Luther

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

Weber summarizes the total effect of Protestantism's new understanding of asceticism, in that it produces people who see accumulating wealth as their moral duty to God, but refuse to spend or enjoy any of it. This concept of asceticism represents the cumulative effect of Luther's calling and Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Weber thus suggests that the main events of Protestant history align to form the capitalist spirit. The ideal Protestant would be a premier capitalist, since his or her entire life is oriented around making money and working in the business world. Because of their moral scruples, Protestants are not allowed to spend that money on luxuries or use their wealth to retire, but can only save or reinvest it—their religious ideals thus make them obsessively prudent with their finances, which will only grow their wealth more and more. This seemingly perfect alignment between Protestantism and capitalist ethics definitively argues that religious ideas, even unintentionally, have massive consequence for the secular, practical world and way that society operates.

> As asceticism began to change the world and endeavored to exercise its influence over it, the outward goods of this world gained increasing and finally inescapable power over men, as never before in history.

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

Weber argues that Protestant asceticism and its emphasis on work and wealth ultimately built the capitalist materialist cosmos of the modern world. Although this observation is both grim and ironic, Weber's point makes logical sense. As he has described thus far, Protestant theology effectively makes its adherents methodical, rational, and tireless in their efforts. Though Weber does not explore it, these three characteristics were all essential for the Industrial Revolution that swept Europe and America throughout the 19th century and allowed society to scale itself en masse, producing huge cities and corporations. The mechanization and long hours the Industrial Revolution required seem impossible for a traditionalist society to commit to. Traditionalism values the daily quality of life over net profit and outputs, which is the precise opposite of the working culture the Industrial Revolution wrought. Thus, as Weber argues it, Protestant asceticism readied society to accept grim living and working conditions, constant hours, and a dire quality of life in the name of profits, which please God. This seems exactly the mindset that the Industrial Revolution needed to flourish as it did.

> It might truly be said of the "last men" in this [capitalist] cultural development: "specialists without spirit, hedonists without a heart, these nonentities imagine they have attained a stage of humankind never before reached."

Related Characters: Max Weber (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

Weber ends his essay by stating his fear that the capitalist spirit wrought by Protestantism will continue, unending and unchallenged, believed to be the pinnacle of human achievement when really it has robbed humanity of its soul. Although Weber remains neutral for most of his examination, this statement suggests that he opposes capitalism's rise to prominence. Although Weber never voices opposition to Protestantism in particular—though he is quite critical of Calvinism—he seems to fear that its ambition for endless profits and rejection of basic enjoyment will continually produce joyless people. The point that future humanity will imagine it has "attained a stage of humankind never before reached" suggests that the capitalist spirit will be so ubiquitous that, even though Weber finds it repugnant, no one will be able to imagine that life could be different. If this happens, then Protestantism will have wrought permanent damage on human society, even while helping it grow to a mind-numbing scale.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, SECTION 1: DENOMINATION AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Weber posits that in every religion with multiple denominations, a certain amount of "social stratification" occurs between them. In Christianity in Europe and America, Protestants hold the majority of managerial, skilled labor, and capital investment positions, while Catholics tend to occupy the lower strata. Weber admits there may be historical causes that contribute to this phenomenon—one such possible reason is that the Protestant Reformation was especially successful in wealthy cities, meaning that Protestants may have started with higher net capital. However, Protestantism and especially Calvinism exert a more authoritarian control over daily life than Catholicism did, so it seems counterintuitive that Protestants would thrive in the free markets.

Weber's introduction establishes that he will cover a swathe of history and cross-reference economics with a study of religious influences. This method of studying how institutions interact within and shape society—religion and economics, in this case—became not only a major focus of Weber's later work, but played a significant role in establishing the field of sociology. The Protestant success in the marketplace indicates that the essay will examine the counterintuitive nature of Protestant behavior.

Although Weber recognizes historical causes for greater levels of wealth amongst Protestants, there are several phenomena which history does not explain. First, the percentage of Catholic students in secondary education training for middle-class professions is drastically lower than the percentage of Catholics populations as a whole. Additionally, Protestants tend to pursue factory careers where they can rise as skilled laborers, which pays well and rewards ambition, while Catholics remain merely craft workers whose income does not scale. Weber notes that religious or political minorities—as Catholics now are—historically flock to the business world, but Catholics do not. He argues that this indicates "distinct mental characteristics" arise from differing religious views.

Weber's theory that different religious traditions impart "distinct mental characteristics" became a staple of his later work, beginning with this text. The fact that these distinct characteristics lead to tangible economic outcomes suggests that one's metaphysical religious ideas ultimately have a major impact on the physical world. Although the modern era tends to ignore its religious influences, Weber's argument suggests that religion plays such a formative role that it needs to be studied and examined, regardless of one's religious beliefs.

Weber wants to determine which characteristics lead to different economic outcomes between Catholics and Protestants. He observes that the Catholic concept of "asceticism" makes them less disposed to accruing wealth, while Protestants are more engaged in the secular world and profit. Catholics are calmer and "less acquisitive" as a result, and view Protestants as too "worldly" and materialistic. While Weber thinks this is the beginning of an explanation, he considers it far too vague to actually be useful, and notes that these stereotypes of Catholics and Protestants are less true in his day than they used to be. And while Protestants were always "acquisitive," Protestants were far from hedonistic or pleasure-seeking in Puritan movements and Calvinist churches.

Weber's argument that the Catholic concept of asceticism makes them less acquisitive by nature again suggests a direct correlation between religious ideology and the physical, tangible world. However, his point that Protestants have never been hedonistic, which usually accompanies wealth—seeking materialism—suggests that the correlation is not as simple as one denomination likes money while the other does not. This implies that the relationship between Protestant beliefs and Protestant outcomes is itself counter-intuitive.

Weber observes that many of the most pious groups, especially the Calvinists, mixed their piety with a sharp business sense. The spread of Calvinists under religious persecution became the "seedbed of the capitalist economy." Additionally, the Quakers and the Mennonites embody the most severe forms of religious control over daily life mixed with a remarkably astute business sense. All of these are merely examples in Weber's "provisional remarks," and he will dig deeper into each denomination's religious beliefs to examine the source of their dominant economic spirit. However, first he must define exactly what he is looking for.

The Calvinists' spread of capitalism suggests that religion plays a formative role not only in the individual life, but also in the economic environment of much of the modern world. Weber names many denominations and historical figures throughout his essay, which builds the historical case for his argument. However, he highlights Calvinists, Lutherans, and the English Puritans as the most important groups to understand.

PART 1, SECTION 2: THE "SPIRIT" OF CAPITALISM

Weber finds the phrase "the 'spirit' of capitalism" "somewhat pretentious sounding," but explains that, in using this phrase, he is trying to merge a range of historical realities into a single illustrative concept. Obviously, particular ideals vary from individual to individual; Weber only wants to capture the essence of the capitalist mindset. The best way to demonstrate what he means by the capitalist spirit is through an illustration.

The so-called "spirit of capitalism" differs from capitalism itself, describing the attitude of the businessperson, not the environment he or she does business in. Weber simplifies an obviously complex and varied attitude to make his argument easier to grasp.

Weber includes source text from a "sermon" by Benjamin Franklin, which counsels on the prudent use of money, credit, and lending, and advises that a man must maximize his profits at all times and orient his daily habits to improve his economic position. Weber notes that Franklin's words have a distinctly moralistic tone to them, as if he were preaching a sermon rather than giving financial advice.

Benjamin Franklin was one of the United States' Founding Fathers and a popular intellectual leader in Pennsylvania. Although Franklin was a self-professed deist, rather than a Christian, his thinking was undoubtedly shaped by his Puritan and Quaker environment.

Weber uses Franklin's "sermon" to criticize the American ethos, which he argues makes accruing wealth one's civic duty, "an end in itself." He argues that this encapsulates the capitalist spirit, especially because Franklin's counsel on money is "ethically slanted," pitched as issues of moral responsibility, even though the advice itself is purely "utilitarian." Weber states that, from his German perspective, this exemplifies the hypocrisy of American virtues. However, Franklin believed his doctrine was a "revelation from God," and Weber admits that it lacks any hedonistic, self-aggrandizing quality. Rather, Franklin's belief that making money is the ultimate ideal for life suggests a "transcendent" quality to the capitalist spirit.

Franklin's treatment of wealth marks a shift from traditional thinking about money, where money is simply the means of survival, earned so a person may buy enough food to live and a roof over their head. Just as Weber notes American hypocrisy, much of his argument will highlight the seemingly hypocritical nature of Protestant theology, which encourages one to become wealthy, but forbids them from living as if they are wealthy. Franklin's "transcendent" ideals about profit suggests that capitalism itself takes on a nearly religious quality.

Weber states that the primary "social ethic" of a capitalist society is that "one's duty consists in pursuing one's calling," their professional occupation, whatever that may be. However, Weber does not believe this idea rose from capitalism itself. Rather, Weber argues that the capitalist spirit pre-dates capitalism's formation in many countries, such as the early United States, which was founded by "preachers and 'graduates,'" not businessmen. Further, the Franklin's countrymen applauded his capitalist spirit, though medieval cultures would have seen it as "contemptible" greed. Although there may have been certain profit-driven individuals before Franklin's day, Weber is mainly interested in the capitalist spirit as a more recent "mass phenomenon."

Franklin's peers celebrate his moralistic pursuit of profit while medieval citizens would have scorned it. This suggests that the Protestant ethic wrought a major change in social thinking and views towards money. This also indicates that ideas society takes for granted now are in fact major departures from historical thinking, which demonstrates the massive degree of change society experiences through history, highlighting the need for sociologists to understand how those ideas have transformed.

Weber states that the capitalist spirit had to contend with "traditionalism," an attitude towards life that Weber will also explain through illustration. He explains that entrepreneurs who needed to increase worker productivity for a short time, such as farmers during a harvest, often paid their workers in "piecework," attaching a set amount of pay to each portion of work done. In a bid to encourage their workers to produce more, farmers often raised their rates during harvest season, expecting their workers to take advantage of the opportunity to make more money.

Weber establishes capitalism and traditionalism as opposing economic viewpoints. Although the historical reality is likely more complex than only two views, Weber again simplifies in order to clearly make his argument without getting lost in pages of historical nuance. The farmer's hope that higher wages will encourage faster work suggests that the farmer expects his harvesters will value profit over leisure.

Instead, under the traditionalist mentality, the workers usually did less work, since the raised rates meant they could make their normal wage with fewer hours of work, and this was enough money to cover their daily needs. Thus, within traditionalism, workers are not inclined to maximize their incomes, but minimize the time they must spend working so they can enjoy the rest of their lives. Weber states that the capitalist's response to this behavior is generally to decrease piecework rates, so the worker must produce *more* to make the same living wage. Low wages are thus believed to increase productivity. However, this often comes at the cost of quality, especially in intensive, skilled labor positions, as the worker's physical health declines from a lack of resources, making them a poorer laborer.

The illustration of the harvester who does not care for profit, only for reducing the number of hours he must work, suggests that the traditionalist attitude values leisure and pleasure over money. The capitalist's response of driving wages lower to increase productivity demonstrates the exploitative nature of modern capitalism. The harvester's ideal is to work less and spend more time enjoying life. However, the farmer overrides that ideal by forcing the harvester into near poverty, so that he must work longer hours against his will.

The best worker for a capitalist enterprise is non-traditional. Rather than trying to maximize income while minimizing effort, the ideal capitalist laborer "performs the work as though it were an absolute end in itself—a 'calling.'" Such a mentality is only produced, however, by a steady "process of education." Once such a mentality is established within a culture, capitalism flourishes. However, Weber notes that certain members of society still tend towards traditionalist values, especially female workers. Weber argues that this mentality among women can be averted by a religious upbringing, particularly among the Pietist traditions. Female workers from such religious backgrounds tend to be better able to focus and demonstrate greater "commitment to the work."

Capitalism's reliance on workers who see work as an end in itself, rather than as the thing that enables of the rest of their lives, suggests that capitalism as an economic system discourages a leisurely, enjoyable life. Here, Weber hints that capitalism may not be the best economic system for human society to flourish. It does seem, however, the best economic system to make human society productive. Weber's note that religious upbringing can combat the traditionalist attitude suggests that Protestantism plays a significant role in developing the capitalist attitude.

Weber observes that economies tend to swing between "subsistence," where people work to survive (traditionalism), and "acquisition," where people work to build wealth (capitalism). The movement between a subsistence economy and acquisition economy often parallels the ebb and flow of the "capitalist spirit." However, Weber argues that it is important to distinguish between the "form" and "motivation" of capitalism, since some economies may take a capitalist form but be comprised of traditionalist workers. Likewise, capitalist workers (motivated by profit for its own sake) may exist within traditionalist economies—much like Benjamin Franklin, whose homeland had not yet developed a fully capitalist economy. Certain businesses, such as banks, will only exist within capitalist, acquisition economies.

This distinction between the form and motivation of capitalism is important to recognize, especially since capitalism as a form predates Protestantism by several centuries. The capitalist spirit can exist in non-capitalist economies, which again suggests that this attitude can arise from sources outside of capitalism itself—namely, religion. The fact that it endures without a capitalist system suggests that the capitalist spirit is infectious, capable of taking hold of a person's thought and becoming its own intrinsic motivator, even without rewards to reap.

Weber uses the textile industry as an example of the traditionalist worker amidst a capitalist economy. Until the mid-1800s, the average textile maker bought his materials, made his product, and sold it all within his own community. He worked five or six hours a day, handled his clients personally, and made a modest but comfortable income, thus making him a traditionalist laborer despite his capitalist environment. However, as soon as an enterprising rival textile maker moves in, carefully organizes, and produces better products at a quicker rate, the once comfortable traditionalist is forced to either adopt the capitalist spirit and compete—though leaving his comfortable lifestyle behind—or allow his business to fail.

The average day of a textile maker starkly contrasts with the modern worker's day. The textile maker works far fewer hours, and though he lives on less, arguably enjoys a greater, more leisurely quality of life. The capitalist spirit's intrusion on his life through a business rival suggests that capitalism thrives because it is a dominating force. When one worker adopts the capitalist attitude, all of his colleagues are forced to follow suit or fail. Though competitive, this gives the capitalist spirit an almost predatory image.

Weber recognizes that the modern capitalist may see no religious basis for their own zeal for work, and admits that, often, the best modern capitalists are largely indifferent to the Christianity. He also admits that some—especially in the United States, where businessmen are revered—may be seduced into such a lifestyle by romanticization of wealth and power. However, Weber argues that more often, the most dedicated capitalists display a modesty that suggests the same asceticism as Benjamin Franklin's moral preaching on smart saving and credit use. While such devotion to work and accumulation of wealth seems "contemptible to pre-capitalist man," it is precisely such attitudes that allow capitalist economies to thrive.

Protestantism's absence from the modern capitalist spirit suggests that, though religion is fading from the public sector, it still exerts such a formative influence that it affects even the non-religious. This seems to validate Weber's long-held belief that organized religion is one of the most powerful influences in society. Regardless of whether someone believes or disbelieves its teachings, organized religion has a major hand in shaping a person's view of themselves and the world.

Weber argues that although the religious connection to the capitalist spirit is less clear today, its roots can be traced back through history. The capitalist spirit clearly contradicts the general morality of past ages, especially within the Catholic Church. The average Catholic viewed his occupational work as, "at best, something morally neutral." Benjamin Franklin's regard for work and profit as a sacred duty would be unthinkable in past ages. If anything, Catholics often gave their excess wealth back to the Church, even to their debtors, to ward off their own guilt and risk of corruption. Weber asks, what then led to the rise of the capitalist spirit, where work is an end in itself, a divine duty, a "calling"?

Catholicism's general disregard for wealth mirrors its concept of monastic asceticism, where one leads a holy life by shunning personal possessions or attachments to the world. This attitude is entirely different from the Protestant ethic that Benjamin Franklin reflects, again suggesting that a major shift occurred in Christianity's thinking about money.

Weber notes that for capitalists like Franklin, the "enjoyment of life" no longer comes from leisure but from economic contributions to society (by creating jobs) and the satisfaction of calculating and achieving profits. Weber notes it may appear that the shift away from the traditionalist lifestyle results from the rise of rationalism, and that rationalism must follow Protestantism. While this may be partially true, Weber argues that rationalism also appears alongside Catholicism in many countries without bringing the same economic shift. Instead, Weber believes that one must investigate the Protestant idea of the calling to truly grasp the development of the capitalist spirit.

Franklin's shift from enjoying leisure to enjoying productivity indicates that, with the capitalist spirit, one must learn to take satisfaction from a busy and productive life, rather than a peaceful and relaxed one. Rationalism's existence within both Catholic and Protestant traditions suggests that it cannot be the primary cause of Protestantism's overwhelmingly capitalist spirit.

PART 1, SECTION 3: LUTHER'S CONCEPTION OF THE CALLING

Weber remarks that the idea of the calling in modern times has a religious connotation, and the further back one traces the idea through history, the stronger that religious connotation becomes. Significantly, there is no equivalent concept in any Catholic tradition, modern or ancient, while every Protestant tradition contains this concept. Weber suggests that the concept originates from Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible, in Ecclesiastes, though ancient translations did not contain such a concept. The calling, as Luther established, describes one's commitment to secular work as the "highest level possible of moral activity." Rather than Catholicism's monastic asceticism, Luther regarded doing one's earthly work well as the only way to honor God.

Martin Luther was a German monk who rebelled against the Catholic Church's corruption and doctrinal beliefs, and thus initiated the Protestant Reformation. Weber's belief that Luther derived his concept of a "calling" from a mistranslation of the Bible suggests that the principle might not be biblical at all, merely developed from Luther's own ideas. Whether the calling comes from the Bible or from Luther's mind, it plays an undeniably important role in Protestant theology and moves work from something one does to survive to the reason for them to exist in the first place.

Luther began his theological journey believing, like the Catholic Church, that one's secular occupation was "morally neutral." However, as he developed his *sola fide* ("faith alone") concept, he started to oppose the monastic lifestyle, since it removed one from the world and the people in it. Luther shifted towards viewing secular work as "the outward expression of Christian charity," since the Christian works for and with his fellow humans. Weber regards this development of the calling as one the most significant "achievements" of the Reformation. However, he denies that Luther himself had any inclination towards capitalism, and observes that the monk often attacked large merchants and their exploitative interest rates.

Sola fide *refers to Luther's belief that salvation comes through faith alone. This differs from the Catholic teaching that salvation comes through observance of the sacraments (certain religious rituals) and doing good works, which Luther regarded as someone trying to earn their own salvation. For Protestants, this idea of salvation by good works becomes the worst taboo. The fact that Luther's concept became the basis of the capitalist spirit suggests that religious ideas are so powerful that they often have unintended consequences.*

Notably, Weber argues that the Bible, which Luther believed supported the calling, is primarily traditionalist in its approach towards money. Jesus, especially, teaches his followers to subsist day by day and not to accrue wealth. Weber posits that Luther's reading of the Bible "was colored by his outlook," but he himself remained a traditionalist for his entire life. His belief in one's calling grew primarily out of his belief in God's "providence," that God placed each person in a particular position, and they should accept and remain in that position for their entire lives.

Weber's argument that the Bible espouses a traditionalist mentality suggests that Protestantism's attitude towards money and economics runs contrary to the Bible. God's "providence" is a critical concept for many Protestant denominations, and refers to the belief that God is sovereign, all-powerful, and carefully controls every single thing that happens on earth, both good and bad.

Luther's view of the calling was new, but steeped in tradition, building upon the German mystics before him. As Luther taught it, the calling was not yet directly tied to the capitalist spirit, but created the seed for other Protestant movements to develop it. In particular, Luther shied away from the "ascetic self-discipline" that later become a staple of the Protestant calling, since it appeared too close to "sanctification [salvation] by works." Weber states that the subsequent Protestant traditions must be examined as well, since they built upon the concept of calling in ways that directly benefit "capitalist development." Of these, Calvinism made the greatest impact, taking many of Luther's ideas to their logical extremes.

The German mystics' influence on Luther's thinking suggests that, although he tried to source his ideas only from the Bible, he was undeniably shaped by his time and place in history as well. Weber suggests that Luther himself was neither a capitalist nor understood how his own ideas would fuel the capitalist spirit. This again suggests that religious ideologies are immensely powerful forces in society, capable of shaping history and causing centuries of unintended consequences.

Weber states that both Lutheranism and Catholicism ardently oppose Calvinism, in part because it created an entirely new relationship "between religious life and earthly action." Compared to the Lutherans and Catholics, the Calvinists embody an "earnest [...] worldliness" and view "life as a task to be accomplished." Weber argues that although historical and political differences exist between groups, they are not enough to explain their radically different concepts of life.

Calvinism formed from the teachings of John Calvin, a French theologian working in Switzerland during the early years of the Protestant Reformation. Although divisive, Calvin sits alongside Luther as one of the most important figures of Protestant history, particularly since he took many of Luther's loose ideas and formed them into a concrete theological system.

Weber states that although the Protestants wrought great economic changes in society, he does not believe that this was ever their intention. The Protestant Reformers were always singularly interested in "the salvation of souls." The fact that their religiously motivated actions created such change simply demonstrates how "'ideas' become effective in history." He also states that he is dealing with the Reformation purely as a "historical cause" and does not mean to evaluate the morality of any Protestant theologies, though neither will he defend them. Nor does Weber mean to prove that the Protestant ethic is solely responsible for developing the capitalist spirit and materialist culture, only that it played a significant role in shaping and fostering it.

Once again, Protestantism's accidental shaping of modern economic history suggests that organized religion is one of the most formative influences on human society, even when those religions don't intend to reach beyond the metaphysical. Weber claims that he does not intend to pass moral judgments on the various Protestant movements, but his upcoming sharp criticisms of Calvinist theology in particular suggest otherwise.

PART 2, SECTION 1: THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF INNERWORLDLY ASCETICISM

Weber states that there are four primary sources of Protestant asceticism: Calvinism, Pietism, Methodism, and the Baptist sects. These denominations all link together in various ways and sometimes cross over each other, such as the Baptists and Calvinists, who were originally opposed but became nearly identical to each other over the centuries. Doctrinal differences, even over predestination, also shifted and combined so that each tradition was "mutually influenced" by each other. Weber argues that although it might seem prudent to ignore the individual doctrines and look only at the practical effects, one must understand the "dogmatic roots" of Protestant asceticism to truly understand its evolution through history. The religious doctrines produced the morality, which in turn created the "psychological drives" that led to the capitalist spirit.

Weber's recognition that the various Protestant denominations interact, merge, and contradict each other suggests that organized religion tends to be dynamic, moving and shaping with the progress of history, both affecting and affected by historical change. His insistence on examining individual doctrines rather than only practical outcomes again suggests that religious ideologies themselves shape the way people see themselves, thus affecting how society operates. The views on morality especially seem to shape the way a person conducts their day-to-day life.

Weber states that the primary point of Calvinist doctrine, the single issue that made several governments see the denomination as a national threat, is the doctrine of "election by grace." Weber quotes the articles of the "Westminster Confession" of 1647, where the doctrine of election (or predestination) was canonized. According to the articles, human beings are wholly wretched, unable to come to God on their own. Thus, God graciously chose a minority of people for salvation, long before he made the earth. These people are the "elect," whom God reveals himself to over the course of their lives. The rest of humanity is damned to hell, as they deserve to be according to humanity's inherent wickedness.

Widespread governmental opposition to the doctrine of predestination suggests that even in the early days of Calvinism, many recognized both its severity and potentially dangerous implications. Although Weber claims to take a neutral stance, his description of Calvinism tends toward bleakness, suggesting that he may be personally opposed to the denomination's teachings. Calvinism's position that that humanity cannot do anything to reach salvation on their own demonstrates the dark side of belief in God's providence, since it implies that God chooses to send most people to hell.

The writer, Milton, claimed he'd rather go to hell than submit to Calvinism's ideal of God. However, Weber claims that he is not aiming to make value judgments, only examining the doctrine's effect in history. John Calvin, its progenitor, "conceptualized" this theory in stages. With each doctrinal debate he had with his opponents, the doctrine of election grew more firmly entrenched in his thinking. In Calvin's view, humanity exists to serve God—God does not exist to serve man. Therefore, "earthly justice" does not apply to God, and for "the reprobate"—those not elected for salvation—to claim God is unjust only reveals their ignorance about his mysterious ways, since God's will cannot be thwarted by human ideals of fairness. Weber argues that this makes God transcendent almost to the point of abstraction, an otherworldly, inscrutable power.

Again, although claiming to make no value judgments, Weber's inclusion of Milton serves to slant the reader against Calvinism. Calvin's gradual and methodical construction of his doctrine contrasts with Luther's development of the idea of the calling, which Weber describes as a loose idea that was mainly in response to Catholic monasticism. Calvin's concept of God elevates itself above human understanding, which effectively argues that if it doesn't make sense, that's only because humans are too small-minded to understand. This seems to mitigate any rational argument against Calvinism.

Weber claims that the doctrine of predestination, in "all the pathos of its inhumanity," darkened the mood of all who ascribed to it, leaving them incredibly lonely. Under Calvinism's logic, each person cannot look to their friends, family, or church to aid them in their quest for salvation. They walk their path alone, towards an end already established, though they don't know whether it will be heaven or hell. For the Puritans (which grew out of Calvinism), Weber argues that this created both their negative attitude towards emotion and sensuality, since those do not aid their salvation, as well as a "pessimistically tinted individualism" that still exists in nations and institution descended from Puritans. Weber notes that the Calvinist's relationship with God is purely internal, an act of "profound loneliness."

Once again, Weber's description of Calvinism's "inhumanity" is not unfounded, but does suggest that he is not as neutral about the denomination as he claims to be. The loneliness that the Calvinist feels suggests that religion, along with shaping society, also shapes the feelings and disposition of the individual adherent. Their individualist position before God contrasts with Catholic theology, which practices the sacraments together as a group.

This pessimistic individualism is particularly notable in Puritan literature, much of which even advises trusting no one but God and being suspicious of one's friends. In **The Pilgrim's Progress**, the most famous Puritan allegory ever written, the main character, Christian, leaves his crying wife and children in the City of Destruction so that he can run to the Celestial City, fingers in his ears to drown out their screams while he shouts, "Life, eternal life." Weber argues that this perfectly encapsulate the selfish outlook of the Puritan, concerned only with his own salvation.

The City of Destruction symbolizes hell and damnation, while the Celestial City symbolizes heaven and salvation. Christian obviously symbolizes the Christian adherent on their path to salvation. Christian's disregard for his wife and children suggests that he values his own salvation more than caring for his family, even for the children that he brought into the world.

With their inner isolation and belief that life only exists to glorify God, the Calvinists took Luther's loose concept of calling and made it a "characteristic part of their ethical system." Thus, within Calvinism, work becomes the primary method to serve and glorify God; it becomes the ethical center of humanity's existence. Weber suggests that the doctrine, inhospitable as it seems, "endured" due to the insecurity it created within its adherents—practicing Calvinists inevitably begin to wonder whether or not they are part of God's elect, since John Calvin taught that human eyes could not possibly judge the difference for themselves—even though Calvin was certain of his own election.

Calvin's certainty of his own salvation appears hypocritical in light of his insistence that no one can know whether they are truly saved. Calvinism effectively systematizes Luther's basic idea, which demonstrates the role that John Calvin played during the Protestant Reformation—while Luther initiated the separation from the Catholic Church, Calvin turned Protestantism from a loose reform movement into a full and powerful system.

Because of their insecurity about their own "state of grace," Weber argues that Calvinists were always looking for "distinguishing features" of the elect, ways to prove to themselves that they are chosen for salvation. This became necessary for church communities as well, since Calvinists believed that people should not participate in Holy Communion unless they are true Christians, among the elect. Although Calvin taught his followers to simply "regard" themselves as "elect" and trust in God's providence, this was impossible. Instead, the main sign of one's salvation was their fulfillment of their earthly calling. "*Tireless labor*" became "the best possible means of *attaining* this self-assurance."

The "state of grace" refers to a person's salvation or damnation. Calvinists come to depend on Luther's concept of the calling to ease their own insecurities. This interaction between Lutheranism and Calvinism demonstrates not only how different religious ideologies build off of each other, but also how those ideologies can combine and have unintended consequences, such as Calvinists' desperate pursuit of work to prove to themselves that they won't go to hell.

While the Lutherans believe that one can emotionally feel God's presence in their souls, Calvinists distrust such appeals to emotion. The consequence of this distrust is that Calvinists must constantly strive to work in their calling, to ensure their life is dedicated to good works, which are "indispensable for salvation." These good works prove that they are properly saved, empowered by God to enable them to lead lives of "Christian conduct." Ironically, Weber (and the Lutherans) argue that though the Calvinists believe they cannot earn salvation but must be given it, their dependence on good works to feel "saved" means that the "Calvinist 'creates' his salvation himself."

Calvinism's reliance on good works to demonstrate their own salvation creates a catch-22, since they believe that works cannot save them, yet works are the only way to know God chose to save them. This demonstrates how even a contradictory, circuitous religious ideology can powerfully shape human behavior. Calvinism's distrust of emotion suggests that the religion tends toward strict rationalism.

Weber argues that practically, this doctrine makes Calvinism one of the most productive religions to ever exist in terms of "moral action." Whereas Catholics live "hand to mouth" regarding salvation—whenever they sin, they can negate that sin with repentance and good works—Calvinists must live their entire lives in action. Their pursuit of their calling, which validates their salvation, is "raised to the level of a system." Although the Calvinist's life is "exclusively directed toward the transcendental goal of salvation," their practical work becomes rationally organized, ruthlessly methodical to prove that their whole lives suggest they are part of God's elect, that they've moved from their natural state to the "state of grace."

The Catholics' "hand to mouth" attitude towards repentance and salvation reflects their traditionalist attitude towards money and wealth. Likewise, the Calvinists' need to constantly prove their salvation to themselves and others reflects their practice of constantly working and profiting, embodying the capitalist spirit. The parallel between religious ideology and practical outcome demonstrates the way that such ideologies can shape human behavior.

Weber states that traditional Christian asceticism, though it involves a monastic life, is less committed to "arbitrary withdrawal from the world" and "self-torment" than in creating a studiously disciplined life, free from the impulsive self which craves hedonistic pleasures. The ascetic aims to be alert, contemplative, and rational at all times. This desire for "absolute self-control" was shared both by Catholics and by Protestants. Weber argues that for both Catholics and Protestants, this "methodical control over the whole man" allowed them to develop their respective "tremendous world-conquering power" and made them formidable agents in history.

Weber's statement that Christian asceticism—both for Protestants and Catholics—contributes to their power to dominate others again suggests that religion plays a powerfully formative role in society, even developing the self-discipline to conquer and control other nations. Considering that Christian countries at one point controlled or colonized the majority of the world, Weber's argument seems well-founded.

Calvinism, however, turns the Catholic's monastic asceticism into "innerworldly [earthly; everyday life]" asceticism, following Luther's push away from monastic tradition. Under Calvinism, those people who'd once made excellent monks moved their ascetic ideals into their secular occupations. One of Calvinism's primary contributions to Luther's idea of the calling was the concept of "putting one's faith to the test in secular working life." However, due to Calvinist doctrine that humanity is fundamentally wretched and opposed to God, those people who view themselves as the elect form a "spiritual aristocracy" that looks down on the "reprobates" around them, hostilely viewing them as "enemies of God."

Weber claims that Calvinism makes its followers lonely, selfish, desperately insecure, and now arrogant towards others, which again suggests that he takes a dire view of Calvinism as a whole and its effect on society and human behavior. Such behaviors underscore the negative impact organized religion can have on society. At the same time, Calvinism's development of the capitalist spirit encouraged the building up of Western society. This suggests that religion's role in society is dynamic, encompassing both positive and negative effects.

Particularly through Calvinism, Reformed Protestants systematized Christian asceticism to such a degree that they kept careful record of their own progress in life. Most prominent theologians advised the practice of keeping a personal journal to record their habits, temptations, and successes, "to feel [their] own pulse." As a result of this "systematization of the ethical conduct of life," Christianity under Calvinism governed every aspect of existence. Weber notes that he has focused mainly on Calvinism so far, in large part because its doctrine of predestination not only became foundational for many subsequent Protestant movements, but also because he finds Calvinism uniquely effective and logically consistent. Its militarism produces a far more methodical life than the Lutheranism, which holds that salvation can be won back through repentance, and thus Lutherans have less need for unceasing labor and vigilance.

The different outcomes between Lutherans and Calvinists, though both groups are Protestant, underscores the powerful effect that religious ideology can have on individual behavior. Even relatively small distinctions, such as Lutheranism's belief that salvation can be won by repentance, result in significant behavioral outcomes. Despite Weber's dark view of Calvinist theology and practice, he seems to respect its logic and effectiveness as an ethical system, regardless of its moral quality.

Lutheranism appears far less constrained by the ascetic impulse, even within its own practice of piety. The Lutheran feels free to let emotions and sentimentality run their due course. As a result of their more gracious ideas on salvation, Weber argues that Lutherans are far less methodical in their lifestyles, though also joyfully uninhibited. He compares the inner repression of the Anglo-American, descended from Calvinists and Puritans, with the comparative freedom of modern Germans, descended from Lutherans. Although Calvin's doctrine of predestination is not the only progenitor of such a rationalized, methodical lifestyle, Weber believes it was of the "utmost psychological efficacy."

Weber establishes a contrast between Lutherans and Calvinists, where Lutherans are less methodical and thus less productive, but happier, and Calvinists are methodical to a fault, and stern. This suggests that although a methodical life is better suited to productivity and capitalist success, this comes at the cost of experiencing pleasure and inner freedom. However, for Calvinists who reject such pleasure or freedom, this hardly seems to be a cost.

The ascetic tradition of Pietism is usually based on the doctrine of predestination and thus closely resembles Calvinism. Where they differ, however, is in the scope of their ascetic practice. The Pietists remove themselves further from the world and distrust institutional theologians. According to Weber, Pietists gather together into closed communities with the aim of completely deadening themselves to worldly influence, in the hope of experiencing the "bliss" of communion with God while still on earth. This hope for an emotional state contradicts Calvinism's rational austerity, while the desire to further disconnect from the secular world occasionally results in a return to monastic life.

The Pietists ironically err into practice that resembles Catholic monastic tradition, even though, as Protestants, they claim to reject that tradition. This suggests that, in some instances, denominational conflicts have more to do with image than with actual practice. The Pietists' emotional hope, in spite of Calvinism's hard rationality, demonstrates the ideological variations that flourish even within connected traditions.

However, when Pietism does not lapse into monasticism and does not abandon the concept of predestination—as Lutheran Pietism did—Weber argues that it produces an even more serious and methodical person. Pietists of this nature go beyond Calvinism and divide the elect into "active" and "passive" Christians, arguing that one may be "elect" and yet not wholly committed to their calling or properly ascetic enough. Such Pietists believe that their "perfection as measured against the [Old Testament] law was a sign of a state of grace" and that God providentially "blesses his own with success in their labors." Such lofty ideals develop an "aristocracy of grace" among many Pietists, much like the Calvinists, which causes them to hold themselves as a sort of elite human being.

The existence of Lutheran Pietism again demonstrates the variation within single traditions as well as how faith traditions overlap and intersect. Impressively, the Pietists create an even more systematized faith practice than Calvinism. This suggests that in some Protestant denominations, religious beliefs exert a militaristic level of control over day to day life. The "aristocracy of grace" suggests that some religious beliefs drive adherents toward supreme arrogance, rather than religious humility.

The German Pietist Zinzendorf added to the Protestant ascetic tradition by arguing for a life of labor in a calling from a utilitarian viewpoint, spurning the "philosophical speculation" of Luther and Calvin. However, in total, Weber views the Pietist movement as a weaker form of Calvinism, at least in its encouragement of a rationalistic, methodical life. Pietism's tendency toward emotional experiences inevitably leads to the desire for pleasure, to enjoy the present. Weber argues that this weakens the capitalist drive, since the prudent capitalist must always save or invest for the future.

Once again, Weber pits any sort of emotional vibrancy or enjoyment of life against the "capitalist spirit," since such things detract from strict rationality and methodical conduct. This suggests that ideal capitalist life is not a happy one, but one of cold calculation and discipline.

Weber states that Methodism was established as the Anglo-American parallel to German Pietism. Like Pietism, breaking from Calvinism, Methodism places increasing emphasis on emotion, arguing that salvation should not be met with austere rationalism, but joy. Because they believe that salvation should be marked by an emotional change, the Methodists lack the Calvinists' grim insecurity, replacing it with an inner happiness. Also breaking from Calvinism, the Methodists believe that God's grace can be lost and won again. This, too, makes their spirits lighter, though Weber notes that some members abuse this "Christian freedom" as an excuse to live undisciplined lives.

The Methodists' lack of insecurity and greater inner happiness contributes to their weakened capitalist spirit. This implies that the capitalist spirit does not often coincide with a happy or contented life, seemingly because a person who is happy with who they are and where they are does not need to commit their entire being to financial success.

Weber argues that Methodism, like Pietism, rests on weaker ethical foundations that allow for a less methodical and rational existence than Calvinism. Because of this, he does not believe Methodism made any significant contribution to the evolution of the calling or development of ascetic practice.

Although Methodism contributes to the historical context of Weber's argument, it is ultimately insignificant to his broader point.

According to Weber, the Baptists, which later spawned the Mennonites and Quakers, contributed to Protestant asceticism through their belief in "the believer's church." Although not the first to adopt this idea, the Baptists hold that the church (in the proper sense) is not a "charitable foundation" or open house of God within a sea of redeemed and unredeemed humanity; rather, it is the exclusive community of "personal believers and born-again Christians" who have actively and inwardly accepted God's grace. Because of this exclusivity, the early Baptists claimed to be the only "true church" and actively shunned the rest of the world, viewing its pleasures as "idolatry."

The Baptist's concept of the "true church" further disconnects practicing Protestants from the simple enjoyment of life, which thus builds upon Protestant asceticism. The belief that the church is no longer a "charitable foundation" suggests that Baptists push away from the Catholic monastic practice of serving the poor as well. Within this ideology, Baptists would be inclined to keep even more of their money, since they no longer practice redistributing it to the needy, which would be a notably un-capitalist behavior.

Weber argues that the Baptist's belief that God speaks to Christians inwardly, though their "inner light," effectively eliminated the concept that the Bible is the "sole authority" of God, since their personal revelations are now valid as well. However, the Baptists share Calvinism's conviction that natural man is wholly beneath God, and also that a life of perfect obedience, lived by conscience, is the only true mark of a Christian. As such, they stress good works, while still denying that the works themselves can lead to salvation. Although the Baptists do not cling as tightly to the calling as Calvinists do, Weber notes that early Baptist communities ethically refused to participate in politics or war, leaving business and economics their only means of making a living. Because of this, early Baptists, particularly the Quakers, threw themselves into the capitalist spirit, where they could ethically put their energy to use.

The Baptists' emphasis on good works as a sign of salvation—and simultaneous denial that good works lead to salvation—suggests that they possess the same insecurity as Calvinists and are caught in the same catch-22. The Baptists' belief that they cannot participate in politics or military service ironically forbids them from any form of public service, implying that their whole existence becomes devoted to personal gain. This suggests that the Baptist concept of asceticism is far more self-serving than Catholic monastic asceticism, which based itself on voluntary poverty and service to the needy.

Weber states that his next objective will be to examine Protestant asceticism's move out of the monastery and into everyday secular life, developing the capitalist spirit within individuals by training them to be rational and methodical in every aspect of their lives. Although it may have had some impact, Weber is less interested in the effects of church discipline and religious rule. Though both were severe under Calvinism, Weber will focus on the development of individual motivation towards capitalist gains.

Weber has thus far touched on Protestant asceticism's origin in various denominations, but hasn't examined asceticism's direct effect on the "capitalist spirit," which he will now pursue. His focus on Protestant asceticism's impact on capitalist development, rather than on the individual as a whole, keeps his argument narrowed to the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism.

PART 2, SECTION 2: ASCETICISM AND THE CAPITALIST SPIRIT

After examining the various differences between denominations, Weber states that he will now treat Protestant asceticism as a "single phenomenon" to simplify his examination. Weber states that English Puritanism, which developed out of Calvinism, provides the best archetype to study new asceticism. English Puritanism is epitomized in the writing of Richard Baxter, the noted Puritan writer and pastor, famed for being both eloquent and objective against his theological opponents.

Although "Puritan" is sometimes used broadly—even by Weber himself—to describe the range of ascetic Protestant traditions, here he focuses specifically on the era of Puritanism in England that eventually gave rise to Protestantism in America. Richard Baxter lived roughly one century after Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Unlike Calvin, who saw wealth as beneficial because it increased the Christian's influence in society, Baxter maintained the traditional ascetic aversion to riches. However, in Baxter's view, wealth was only dangerous because it encouraged "idleness," which he regarded as a supreme sin and threat to the "holy life." In Baxter's view, working hard at one's calling was still the greatest mark of salvation, and thus all people must work, poor or wealthy, since "enjoyment of wealth," luxury, and idle talk drew the believer towards sin and vice.

Baxter's antagonism towards luxury and relaxation again suggests that, in Protestant asceticism, simple pleasure and enjoyment is the antithesis of a righteous life, since it could possibly lead to sin. This again suggests that the Protestantism that developed out of Calvin's theology was increasingly grim and joyless.

Through this ideal, wealth itself no longer represents the real threat; only the *enjoyment* of wealth and its luxury is sinful. The Puritan may be extravagantly wealthy and still ascetic, so long as they don't stop working in order to enjoy their riches. Weber notes that this is a sharp contrast to medieval asceticism—as taught by Thomas Aquinas—which holds that the most productive spiritual activity is prayer and contemplation, not labor. What Martin Luther began with his loose concept of the calling, Baxter took to far greater lengths, teaching that laboring in one's specific field produced the greatest "fruits," evidences of a virtuous life.

The contrast between Baxter's and Aquinas's views of asceticism suggests that Christianity's values essentially flipped. While the slow and meditative life was once ideal, under Protestantism the tirelessly busy life becomes the new model of righteousness. Baxter takes Luther's ideas to the extreme, suggesting that religious ideas can dangerously spiral far beyond what their original author intends, with significant consequences.

Consequently, Baxter viewed those who moved between fields, from temporary job to temporary job, as "casual and irregular," at risk of "idleness" and losing their virtue. Moreover, Baxter taught that one's calling must be beneficial to their community by providing a useful service, and must pursue the maximum profits possible. Since his theology held that God providentially gives his followers opportunity to profit, letting one of these opportunities pass by is considered a rejection of God's providence. Within this frame, Baxter establishes wealth-making as God's command on the Christian life, while enjoying that life is sinful and idolatrous.

Baxter's theology subverts Catholic teaching and even the traditionalist attitude of the Bible, including Jesus Christ's attitude. Where Christ taught his disciples to let go of riches and possessions, Baxter and the English Puritans believe that accruing wealth—but not enjoying it—is God's command. This highlights how religious beliefs can develop and change through history, and even completely subvert themselves.

Since Puritan theology celebrates the profit-seeking middle-class businessman, theologians like Baxter highlighted Old Testament scriptures that imply wealth is the sign of God's favor, such as the ending of the book of Job. However, Weber argues that this conveniently overlooks the majority of the Old Testament which takes a thoroughly traditionalist stance towards money and warns against pursuing wealth. Weber states that the Puritans commit a similar mistake by arguing that "formal legal observance" of ascetic Old Testament laws please God, even though the majority of Palestinian Judaism—which produced the Old Testament—practiced the "uninhibited enjoyment of life."

According to Weber, Puritan theology selectively focuses on scriptures that validate their own wealth. However, the idea that wealth is a sign of God's favor carries the dark implication that poverty is a sign of God's disdain. This would further suggest that, especially in Britain's violent colonial era, those people who are poor because they've been subjugated by the British are actually poor because God does not like them. This belief, taken to its logical conclusion, embodies the very worst of exploitative religion supporting colonial expansion.

Weber describes that the Puritan's "rational asceticism" is wholly opposed to the "uninhibited enjoyment of life." However, they did permit some recreation, such as sport, so long as it served a rational purpose like encouraging physical fitness. Dance halls and taverns, however, were considered utterly anti-ascetic and thus antithetical to the "holy life." Although Puritanism embraces history and scholarship and is itself steeped in Renaissance ideas, it rejects "art that appeals to the senses" and non-scientific literature, since it seems superfluous and does not provide—in their view—any rational function to God or to humanity. Weber notes that Puritans sometimes broke this disdain for art by appreciating the greats of the past, such as Rembrandt. However, the singular rule of Puritan pleasure is that it must not cost money, since that would be a poor use of the money God gave them to manage and grow.

Puritanism's opposition to art and anything that appeals to the senses suggests that their theology discourages vibrant culture and expression. Along with the rise of dominating capitalism and obsession with work, one of the major consequences of the capitalist spirit seems to be a loss of culture. Weber's statement that Puritans could sometimes enjoy themselves as long as they did not spend money suggests that their obsession with growing their wealth ruled over every aspect of their lives and made them miserly to the core.

In total, Protestant asceticism discourages "consumption" and free "enjoyment" of wealth, while also breaking down any religious aversion to pursuing financial gain by teaching that God wants his followers to profit. Asceticism inspires Protestants to labor without ceasing and to save or re-invest their profits into "practical" ends, rather than spend it on enjoyment or luxury. Weber states that this "obsessive desire" to build wealth effectively catalyzed the middle class, especially in Puritan communities, by instilling people with an "economically rational" mindset. Armed with spiritual discipline and an austere, methodical approach to life, the Protestant could now build his wealth with a "clear conscience"—and believe that it is even his moral "duty" to do so. However, wealth inevitably secularizes people and brings the many temptations now available with it.

Again, Protestant asceticism effectively flips Catholic monastic values on their head. Where the Catholic ideal life is quiet, contemplative, and free from influence of wealth, the Protestant ideal is one of perpetual busyness and accumulation of wealth. Protestant asceticism's encouragement to save or reinvest one's earnings reflects the mentality of the studious modern middle class as well, which confirms Weber's argument of the direct connection between Protestant ethics and the modern capitalistic mentality.

As the businessmen rise, Weber argues that they could conveniently interpret their dominance and obvious wealth inequality as God's divine will, which secretly plays into his own plans for humanity. Additionally, the capitalist could enjoy better, more dependable and methodical workers who saw work not as the mere means to an end, but as their primary reason for existence, their mandated role in which to serve God. Weber suggests that this new form of asceticism thus plays a powerful role in developing the capitalist spirit.

The capitalists' ability to interpret wealth inequality as God's will suggests that Protestant ethics entrench social disparity and poverty, rather than combat it. This again seems antithetical to both the Catholic monastic tradition and Jesus's teachings in the New Testament, which advocate for relinquishing wealth and sharing with the poor.

Weber concludes that Puritan asceticism was handed down to modern society, even for those not religious themselves: "The Puritans wanted to be men of the calling—we, on the other hand, must be." When asceticism moved from a monastic concept to the backbone of working life, Weber argues that it built the "mighty cosmos of the modern economic order" that seems to have no end in sight. Though Baxter advised his followers against materialism, the modern rising living standards have produced an era that is more fundamentally materialist than any era in human history. Even in countries that have largely shed their religious influences, the capitalist spirit remains the most dominant impulse. People work ceaselessly without really knowing why.

Weber's statement that all people are now "men of the calling" suggests that one cannot simply reject Protestantism's influence over their life by not participating in religion. The fact that, according to Weber, Protestantism developed the capitalist spirit, which led to the modern materialist age is grimly ironic. Rather than creating a world free from greed, poverty, or disparity, Protestant Christianity seems to have encouraged it.

Weber fears that this will only continue, that future humanity will imagine itself to be the height of human culture, when really it is the least culturally developed and most enslaved to work. However, that is beyond the scope of his historical examination of Protestantism's development of the capitalist spirit. Although religion is not solely responsible for modern capitalism, Weber argues that it played a significant role in shaping it.

Weber's fear that future humanity will be the least cultured people to ever exist stems from Puritanism's rejection of artistic expression in favor of labor and profit.

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