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Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Notes on the text

Introduction

13 Western civilization - science

14 Rational law, art

15 Architecture

16 Political bureaucracy - state

17 Rational capitalism; acquisitive impulse everywhere

17f Definition of capitalism - profit through peaceful exchange; calculation and bookkeeping; money; continuous and regular exchange

19f NB - non-continuous calculation everywhere, adventure and war acquisition, money-lending

21 Only in West - formally free labor; separation of business from household with rational book-keeping (small beginnings elsewhere); rational organization of labor (and socialism)

24f Technical factors - science (math and experiments) - but applied

- law and administration - rationality not of mystical contemplation, but for material ends

27 Religious ideas of economic ethos; rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism - predestination to adopt rational conduct

Chapter I

Economic differences between Catholics and Protestants: Protestants higher class levels

39 NB - Protestants not a minority in Germany (as Jews, Huguenots, etc.)

41 NB - not because Protestants want to live better (or are more acquisitive)

42f NB - not because Protestants were less otherworldly, ascetic, or pious

Chapter II

47 Definition of spirit of capitalism must come at end

48-50 quotes Franklin

51 Ethic or ethos: duty to make money, not for enjoyment

52 This is the spirit of modern Western capitalism

virtues useful - utilitarian

54 Such an ethos becomes "systematic" - requires conformity or ruins nonconformists

55 Thus - explanation is historical, need to explain origins

56 Such an ethos "had to fight its way to supremacy against a whole world of hostile forces" - seen as avarice

57f Unscrupulous, unethical acquisitiveness found elsewhere, was traditional

58f Greatest obstacle is traditionalism - of laborers who only "work to live"

62 (Once capitalism is a system, it can recruit labor easily - no alternative work)

NB - labor as a calling

63f - Traditional entrepreneur: rationality, profit, book-keeping, trade, etc. can have a traditional character, be limited

NB - attitude of mind and organization of enterprise can occur separately

(cf. pp. 74-75; 14th and 15th century Florence vs. 18th backwoods Pa.)

65f Traditional spirit of capitalism

66f NB example of textile industry - picture of change from traditional to modern capitalism - note how traditionalism was destroyed by competition

69 Note ethical strength needed by new entrepreneur to overcome traditional hostility

Sort of men - not dare-devils, but hard calculators; but such men are no longer religious

72 Modern capitalism needed this attitude to get started - no longer needs it

75 "To speak here of a reflection of material conditions in the ideal superstructure would be patent nonsense." (cf. Marx)

76f Rationalization of capitalism does not follow Western rationalization as a whole

e.g. law (Roman law in economically backward countries vs. common law), or philosophy (eg. Voltaire's rationalism or practical rationalism of individual egoism as in Italy and France)

78 Rationalism as such, too broad a concept - must find particular aspects

Chapter III

79 Concept of calling or Beruf exists only for Protestant peoples

80 Concept new with Reformation: "the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which moral activity of the individual could assume" - not to surpass worldly morality in monastic ascetism

80f - cf. Aquinas' Catholic concept - work as morally neutral, like eating and drinking

82 Luther not friendly to capitalism, against usury

83 Traditional attitude: fulfill your given duty

84-5 Began as worldly indifference, but with his worldly experience (conflicts, peasant uprising), Luther became more conservative - given order a manifestation of God's will; obedience to authority

87f Real break from Catholicism came only with Calvinism and Puritanism (compare Dante's Divine Comedy with Milton's Paradise Lost)

89f Methodological comments

Chapter IV

97 Interested in influence of psychological sanctions, originating in religion, on practical conduct

98 A. Calvinism

98f Doctrine of predestination

104 Psychological consequence of the doctrine - "a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual:" in most important thing, eternal salvation, no one could help him - no priest, no sacraments (destiny foreordained), no Church, no God (Christ died only for the elect) - though, must obey

105f Disenchantment of world reached climax here - all ceremony eliminated; no sensuous culture; promoted individualism; no trust in friendship; no confession (NB psychological release) - thus spiritual isolation (cf. Bunyan, Pilgrim's Progress)

108 Explanation of superior Calvinist social organization and destruction of individual's ties to the world

Dogmatically - for glorification of God, carrying out his commandments: requires social organization, labor in calling

109f Personally - answer to the question "Am I one of the elect?" Whether there are signs

111 Practical pastoral work had to deal with personal suffering: (a) duty to reject doubts as work of devil and sign of insufficient faith, and

112 (b) intensive worldly activity (work) recommended to show state of grace.

112f cf. Lutheran's mystical unity with God or other-worldly mysticism

113f Feeling of salvation (a) as vessel of Holy Spirit, or (b) as tool of divine will

- (a) leads to mysticism and emotionalism (Luther), (b) leads to ascetic action (Calvin)

115 Good works: (a) accumulation of credits or points (Catholicism) or (b) systematic and life-long self-control of conduct or be damned (Calvinism)

116 Picture of traditional Catholic and Calvinist system of good works: (a) Catholic non-systematic, non-rational activity - traditional obedience + sin and discharge (relief provided by priest, Church, doctrine); (b) Calvinist - required "life of good works combined with a unified system" - no relief and discharge, world demystified, disenchanting, rationalized

118f cf. Catholic monasticism - (i) part of whole church organization, monastery - life not for everyone, (ii) rejection and transcendence of everyday work and life

120 Calvinists as monks or saints within the world - separated them from ordinary sinners more than monks were: no compassion for human weakness

123f Puritan ethical book-keeping: "The process of sanctifying life could thus almost take on the character of a business enterprise".

124f Christianization/rationalization of all of life

128 Lutheranism lacked psychological sanction of systematic conduct leading to rationalization, because of doctrine of grace; Calvinist doctrine of predestination only one possible motive

128 B. Pietism - also held to doctrine of predestination

129f Invisible church - intensified asceticism and wished for community with God in this life - - more emotional, weakening of inhibitions, led to sort of monasticism

131 But led also to stricter ascetic control of conduct in the calling

137 Weaker than Calvinism

139 Pietism related to official, clerk, worker, domestic, patriarchal employer;

Calvinism related to hard legalism and active enterprise of bourgeois-capitalist entrepreneurs

139 C. Methodism - Anglo-American correspondent to German pietism

143 But emotional, once awakened, redirected to search for perfection

144 D. Baptist Sects - 2nd, independent source of Protestant asceticism besides Calvinism

144f Community of personal believers of the reborn - not a visible church, but a sect

145 Salvation offered to all - remained to wait and not resist Spirit by sinful attachment to the world (adult converts baptized as symbol)

146 Element of avoidance of the world; strict bibliocracy

146f Divine Authority revealed through, but not only through, Bible: all church authority eliminated

148 Gift of grace could not be earned, but came only to one who followed his conscience, and good works were necessary: equivalent in practice to Calvinist doctrine since predestination rejected, psychological basis of Baptist morality was expectant waiting for Spirit to descend - attempt to overcome impulsive and irrational: flesh silent

149 Disenchantment here also led to systematic conduct and worldly ascetic virtues

149f NB Otherworldly monasticism also rejected, following Luther

150 Anti-political, anti-state

151 Promoted capitalistic "honesty is the best policy"

153-4 Recap of chapter; Christian asceticism had regulated the world from monastery, through church, but left economic life alone: it now took on this task as well

Chapter V

157 Puritan strictures against wealth: against enjoyment

159f Calling - must work; psychological consequences

Luther - classes expression of divine will

161 Baxter - calling for systematic work: ascetic

162 - Profitableness sign of usefulness

163 - Wealth bad, work good

165-6 Jews - traditional capitalists; Puritans - modern: organization of labor and capital

170 Responsibility toward acquisitions as trustee of God's gifts

170-1 Sum of above - not against rational acquisition but irrational use of wealth, against traditional ostentation - for bourgeoisie

172 Result - accumulation of capital

175 Wesley - work creates wealth, which corrupts religion

176-7 - Same re/ capitalist

178-9 Effect of asceticism on worker, on businessman

181f Iron Cage