

WEBER'S PROTESTANT ETHIC

Origins, Evidence, Contexts

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and Guenther Roth,
Editors

Weber's Protestant Ethic

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GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE
Washington, D.C.



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

1987

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The Historiography of Continental Calvinism

PHILIP BENEDICT

The reception of Max Weber's celebrated essay on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and its mutation into the "Weber thesis debate" represent a fascinating chapter in the cultural and intellectual history of the twentieth century. Among the many themes of that history that a full account of the widely varying responses to Weber's essay would illuminate are the still powerful hold of confessional rivalries in the early decades of the century and their subsequent weakening as the century advanced; the force of disciplinary traditions and national contexts in an increasingly professionalized academic world; the radical transformation of methods and problems in recent historiography; and the advance of neoclassical outlooks within economic history.

This essay explores just part of the story: the reception, influence, and current status of the ideas set forth in Weber's essay among historians of European Calvinism. More specifically, it restricts its attention primarily to general histories of Calvinism and to work done on the movement's history in France, Geneva, the Netherlands, Scotland, and (at the risk of straying onto the turf of other conference participants) England, above all Old England. This requires a somewhat elastic definition of Calvinism, but the contrast between Weber's reception among historians of continental Calvinism and English Puritanism or Protestantism is sufficiently revealing to justify any definitional liberties thus taken.

Some preliminary definition of just which Weber thesis this essay intends to discuss is also necessary, for the richness of Weber's thought means that there are many different ways of being Weberian, while at the same time, as numerous commentators on the Weber

The author would like to thank Wendell Dietrich and Herman Roodenburg for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

thesis debate have pointed out, critics of *The Protestant Ethic* have often directed their fire at arguments that Weber himself did not advance. As a result, the spectrum of issues discussed in the debate has been substantially broader than the specific claims put forth by the Heidelberg sociologist. This essay focuses primarily on the literature addressed to three claims: (1) the broad assertion that Calvinism in some manner encouraged the growth of modern capitalism; (2) the somewhat narrower claim (in fact, not Weber's own at all) that formal Calvinist economic ethics somehow contributed to the rise of capitalism; and (3) Weber's specific interpretation of the character or psychology of Calvinism, built around his understanding of the unintended consequences of the doctrine of predestination.

Having defined the contours of the story I intend to tell here, let me now break all the rules of effective narration and give away the plot line. Weber's ideas have provoked a considerable amount of comment and criticism from historians of Calvinism ever since they first appeared. A substantial literature has grown up around certain questions growing out of the Weber thesis debate. Nonetheless, when one surveys the broad range of writings devoted to the subject of early modern Calvinism, what is most striking of all is that the thesis in its broadest form has had remarkably little influence in stimulating and directing the main stream of research on the subject, except in England. Since the Weber thesis would seem to confer great importance on the history of Calvinism by suggesting that it played a particularly crucial role in moving European society down the road to modernity, this may seem surprising indeed. It points up the extreme compartmentalization of knowledge in the twentieth century and the considerable gulf between the concerns and training of those who have written about Calvinism, on the one hand, and those of Weber and of latter-day Weberians housed generally in departments of sociology, on the other.

To convince oneself of the accuracy of the claim that Weber's ideas have exercised relatively little – indeed, perhaps a declining – influence on the main stream of research on European Calvinism, one need only turn to those rare works that have offered general histories of the subject. The earliest and most ambitious such survey, *Het calvinisme gedurende zijn bloeitijd in de 16e en 17e eeuw; zijn uitbreiding en cultuurhistorische beteekenis* (*Calvinism in its Hey-day in the 16th and 17th Centuries: Its Spread and Cultural-Historical Significance*), was left

incomplete by the death of its author, A. A. van Schelven, in 1954.¹ After a decade spent in the pastorate, during which a particular concern of his was the handling of pietistically inclined congregations, van Schelven served as professor of history at the Calvinist Free University of Amsterdam until he was removed from his post following World War II for political activities during the Occupation that the University judged compromising.² Perhaps because of his interest in the origins of pietistic forms of Reformed devotion, which he regarded as prone to diverge from the original spirit of the movement, he displayed a more sympathetic interest in the questions raised by Weber's work than most of his contemporaries among Calvinist church historians, and his 1925 pamphlet, *Historisch Onderzoek naar het levensstijl van het Calvinisme* (*Historical Investigation of the Calvinist Lifestyle*) suggests that the desire to determine how broadly the faith could be said to have promoted the sorts of practices that the "Heidelberg school" diagnosed as characteristic of it formed one of the major impetuses to his decision to undertake an extensive comparative study of it across Europe.³ Whereas this pamphlet argued that Weber's depiction of the style of life promoted by Calvinism applied convincingly to Puritan England but could not be said to describe the character of seventeenth-century French Calvinism so accurately (a contrast in national styles that van Schelven attributed to the influence of the English national character), *Het calvinisme gedurende zijn bloeitijd* devoted consistently less attention to these themes with each successive volume and proved consistently more negative in its judgments as to the accuracy of Weber's ideas. These van Schelven found in 1951 to be unconvincing even when applied to England.⁴

Weberian themes occupy considerably less space in the classic one-volume English-language synthesis of 1954, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, written by John T. McNeill of the Union Theological Seminary. To be specific, these themes and questions are

1 A. A. van Schelven, *Het calvinisme gedurende zijn bloeitijd in de 16e en 17e eeuw; zijn uitbreiding en cultuurhistorische betekenis*. I Genève-Frankrijk (Amsterdam, 1943); II Schotland-Engeland-Noord-Amerika (Amsterdam, 1951); III Polen-Bohemen-Hongarije-Zevenburgen (Amsterdam, 1965).

2 *Biographisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme* (Kampen, 1983), II, pp. 387-389.

3 Van Schelven, *Historisch Onderzoek naar het levensstijl van het Calvinisme* (Amsterdam, 1925).

4 *Het calvinisme gedurende zijn bloeitijd*, I, 30-37, 62-68, 263-271; II, 82-86, 276-281; III, 52-53, 123.

taken up in two brief sections, amounting in all to 6 of the book's 454 pages.⁵ In McNeill's view, the entire subject of Calvinism's economic significance had yet to receive adequate investigation at the time of his writing, some forty-nine years after the appearance of Weber's initial essay. He nonetheless criticized Weber's depiction of the psychology of Calvinism sharply while accepting that Calvin contributed something to the development of capitalism through his insistence on frugality, his abhorrence of wasting time, and his acceptance of the permissibility of lending money at interest under certain conditions.

McNeill's volume shows that Weber's ideas were still alive, if by no means central, issue for church-related scholars of his generation. The recent collective volume edited by Menna Prestwich, *International Calvinism 1541–1715*, suggests that they have subsequently become more marginal yet for a team of scholars actively involved in research on the subject, who are affiliated primarily with secular departments of history. A single paragraph in the Introduction dismisses claims that Calvinism might have furthered capitalism. Thereafter, only one hint of Weberian themes appears in any of the essays in the book devoted to the history of Calvinism in specific countries and eras (the essay devoted to colonial America), before a final chapter devoted specifically to his ideas reprints unmodified a sharply critical assessment of them first published over twenty years previously.⁶ Apparently, the last word on this subject had been said in the 1960s.

Why should Weber's ideas have exercised so little influence on the main stream of research on non-English Calvinism? Some additional reasons appear in due course further along in this essay. For now, let me stress how different the research agendas and interpretive traditions shaping most of the active investigation of the movement's history have been from the German sociologist's preoccupation with the sources of the modern West's distinctive forms of rationality. For the most part, the history of European Calvinism has been written on a country-by-country basis by natives of the country involved or their ethnic cousins overseas. During the first half of the century, these historians were particularly likely to have been believers or to

5 John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York, 1954), 222–223, 418–421.

6 Menna Prestwich, *International Calvinism 1541–1715* (Oxford, 1985), esp. 9–10, 269, 369–390.

have belonged to the subcommunity defined by ancestral allegiance to the faith. Often they have been theologians or members of departments of ecclesiastical history. What they have written has tended to grow out of an agenda dictated by contemporary theological concerns and by the issues raised by the historical experience of the specific national church tradition to which they belong. Thus, in Scotland, with its rich history of schisms over ecclesiastical issues, the most enduringly debated and researched issue has been whether the Reformed “kirk” was originally episcopalian or presbyterian in structure.⁷ In France, where the Protestant minority long had to struggle to counter anti-Protestant prejudice and to assert its right to full status within the national community, historical writing about the faith has largely focused on its political and legal situation and has served to chronicle its endurance in the face of hostility and persecution.⁸ Such concerns and traditions have served as a barrier to constructive engagement with Weber’s ideas, and they have been a significant reason why so much of the debate that his ideas have engendered has been, as several commentators on it have remarked, a dialogue of the deaf.

In the past thirty years, the tendency for religious history to be written by people attached to the institutions or traditions they are writing about has diminished, and work on Calvinism has increasingly come from historians who are not themselves affiliated with the faith. But this has not produced much research more receptive to Weber’s ideas, since in this same period early modern religious history has been overtaken by new questions and methods, most notably by a new concern to understand “popular religion,” whether by employing the tools of the retrospective sociology of religion pioneered by Gabriel LeBras and his disciples among French religious historians, or by adopting a more ethnographic approach of the sort more commonly favored by English historians. No longer does it seem adequate to infer the behavior and psychology of ordinary believers from doctrinal treatises written by ecclesiastical spokesmen. The terms in which the Weber thesis debate was initially framed now look like relics from an earlier era of church history. Furthermore, thanks above all to the work of such historians as H. O.

7 David Stevenson, “Scottish Church History, 1600–1660: A Select Critical Bibliography,” *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, XXI (1982), 209–220, esp. 220.

8 A very illuminating discussion of the context of French Protestant historical writing may be found in David Nicholls, “The Social History of the French Reformation: Ideology, Confession, and Culture,” *Social History*, IX (1984), 25–43.

Evennett, John Bossy, and Jean Delumeau, early modern religious historians now have a new appreciation of the parallels between the Protestant and Catholic Reformations and the extent to which post-Tridentine Catholicism also encouraged practices of systematic self-discipline similar to those Weber diagnosed as giving Calvinism its particular modernizing force.⁹ In the light of this work, historians are not only far more skeptical than their counterparts of earlier generations about claims for Protestantism's distinctive modernizing impact; they are also aware of the superficiality of Weber's knowledge of early modern Catholicism, which several observers have suggested owes more to hostile contemporary stereotypes of the *Kulturkampf* than to the reality of post-Tridentine practice.¹⁰ The next step for early modern religious historians may well be to undertake close comparative studies of two or more confessional groups in similar economic and social circumstances that could highlight the distinctive impact of each religion, but for now, the emphasis is on the commonalities of their experience of the religious changes brought about by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

To say that the Weber thesis has not exercised a powerful influence on the main stream of research on European Calvinism is not to say, however, that his ideas have gone unnoticed by those most actively involved in work on the subject. On the contrary, such historians and those studying early modern religious history more generally have produced a steady stream of commentary on Weber's ideas. Their comments on them serve to reveal some of the additional forces that have shaped their reception, as a brief survey the literature on the subject in France will show us.

Initially, those working from within a confessional perspective were almost uniformly hostile to Weber's arguments, whereas non-Calvinist historians, especially those more receptive to the social sciences more generally, responded more positively. The most extended early critique of Weber's ideas in French was offered by Emile Doumergue, the great Calvin scholar who taught from 1880 until

9 H. O. Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, ed. John Bossy (Cambridge, 1968); John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1985); Jean Delumeau, *Le Catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire* (Paris, 1971).

10 Hartmut Lehmann, *Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus: Gottesgnadentum und Kriegsnutz* (Stuttgart, 1980), 145; idem, "Ascetic Protestantism and Economic Rationalism: Max Weber Revisited after Two Generations," *Harvard Theological Review*, LXXX (1987), 312; Herman Roodenburg, "Protestantse et katholieke askese. Gedragsvoorschriften bij contrareformatorische moralisten in de Republiek, + 1580 - + 1650," *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift*, VIII (1981-1982), 613.

1919 at the faculty of Protestant theology at Montauban. Doumergue thought the issues raised by the “école de Heidelberg” sufficiently important to devote in 1917 a long chapter in his monumental *Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps* to an extended, perceptive, and often impatient critique of the ideas of Weber and Troeltsch.¹¹ To this theologian, for whom Calvin’s work in Geneva represented a model of genuine Calvinism, to be contrasted to the liberal Protestantism so prevalent in the later nineteenth-century France of his youth, the picture of Calvinism that these men advanced was a gross misapprehension of the faith based far too heavily on later Calvinist writings, especially those of certain English divines. Doumergue was also an active defender of his community against the crude anti-Protestant propaganda that flourished under the Third Republic. One strand in that propaganda blamed Protestantism for particularly exploitative forms of modern capitalism. Doumergue may well have found Weber’s arguments uncomfortably reminiscent of contemporary polemics.¹² Although he did not deny that Protestantism had served to promote prosperity, he attributed this to a far simpler cause than to the psychological sanctions for earnest labor engendered by the doctrine of predestination: Calvinism’s superior morality. In Doumergue’s eyes, the arguments of the école de Heidelberg totally misconstrued Calvinism’s true effect on its believers, which was not to make them anxious or singleminded pursuers of profit, but honest, socially concerned individuals devoid of excessive attachment to the things of the world.¹³

11 Emile Doumergue, *Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps*, 7 vols. (Lausanne, 1899–1927), V, 624–665.

12 Jean Bauberot, “La vision de la Réforme chez les publicistes antiprotestants (fin XIXe–début XXe)” in Philippe Joutard ed., *Historiographie de la Réforme* (Neuchâtel, 1977), 219, 226–227, 237n. Further biographical details on Doumergue may be found in the *Dictionnaire de biographie française* (Paris, 1933–), XI, 686–687.

13 A similar rejection of Weber’s ideas for similar theological reasons came from within the tradition of early-twentieth-century Dutch Calvinism, where Abraham Kuyper had constructed a powerful religious party around his vision of Calvinism as an all-encompassing ethic that provided the only true alternative to the evils of both unfettered capitalism and materialist socialism. The writings of Albert Hyma, *Christianity, Capitalism and Communism* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1937), and “Calvinism and Capitalism in the Netherlands, 1555–1700,” *Journal of Modern History*, X (1938), 321–343, offer the strongest criticisms of Weber from within this tradition. Hyma was a transplanted Dutchman who taught at the University of Michigan, where, in addition to carrying out research on a number of problems of late medieval and early modern Dutch history, he sought to apply the outlook of the anti-revolutionary movement to contemporary American problems. In the wake of Doumergue, Hyma found fault with Weber’s ideas on the grounds that they represented a misunderstanding of genuine Calvinism and of the effect of its doctrine of predestination on believers. He also added certain criticisms specific to the Dutch context, namely, that the most strongly Calvinist regions of the Netherlands were the northernmost provinces,

Even though the Huguenot community in France was one whose members became increasingly prominent in trade and banking over the course of the early modern period, those historians of Reformed affiliation who wrote not about Calvin in Geneva but about the history of the Huguenot minority in France initially proved equally critical of Weber's ideas. Four different works of the 1950s and 1960s discussed Calvinism's relation to capitalism in early modern France. All argued that the primary cause of any correlation that might have appeared over time between the Protestant minority and mercantile success was not Calvinist theology but the persecution and discrimination that the disciples of this theology experienced in France.¹⁴ Herbert Lüthy, the social and economic historian of the eighteenth-century "Protestant bank" who divided his academic career between Basel and Zurich, offered a particularly extensive and influential critique of the Weber thesis. Although accepting that pietistic Protestantism provided an impulse to disciplined labor in this world, Lüthy rebutted all of the other traditionally claimed contributions made by Calvinist doctrine to the development of capitalism and stressed that the prominent role of Protestants in eighteenth-century French trade and banking was largely a function of historical circumstance. Although the flight of the Huguenots after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes created an international mercantile diaspora conducive to trafficking capital across international boundaries, absolutist dirigisme, the diversion of potentially productive resources into the purchase of places in a hypertrophied administrative bureaucracy, and

which did not witness as spectacular capitalist development in the seventeenth century as did Holland, and that within the cities of Holland, dedicated Calvinists were more frequently found among the workingmen than among the mercantile elites. Hyma's criticisms of the applicability of the Weber thesis to the Low Countries are echoed in (Cardinal) de Jong's *Handboek der Kerkgeschiedenis*, III, *De Nieuwere Tijd* (1517–1789) (Utrecht, 1948), 78; and H. R. Trevor-Roper, "Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change" in his *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Other Essays* (New York, 1969), 7. It is permitted, nonetheless, to wonder if his claims about the social profile of Dutch Calvinism do not draw as much upon twentieth-century religious geography and upon the Kuyperians' self-image as the party of the "little people" as they do upon reliable seventeenth-century evidence. For some brief details on Kuyper and his movement, see Dirk Jellema, "Abraham Kuyper's Attack on Liberalism," *Review of Politics*, XIX (1957), 472–485.

¹⁴ Alice Wemyss, "Calvinisme et capitalisme," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, CII (1956), 33–36; Herbert Lüthy, *La Banque Protestante en France*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1959–1961), I, 1–33; idem, *Le Passé présent. Combats d'idées de Calvin à Rousseau* (Monaco, 1965), 13–118; Samuel Mouris, *Le Protestantisme en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1967), 129; Emile G. Léonard, *Le Protestant français* (Paris, 1955), 55ff. The same arguments may also be found in Janine Garrisson-Estèbe, *L'homme protestant* (Paris, 1980), 63. But see Léonard, *Histoire générale du Protestantisme*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1961–1964), I, 308–309.

the intolerance of the Counter-Reformation damped down entrepreneurial activity among France's Catholic majority. It hardly needs saying that the tradition of interpretation emphasizing the force of persecution in stimulating Huguenot commercial activity, a tradition established well before Weber began to write,¹⁵ accords well with the dominant accents of Huguenot historiography.

In contrast to the critical reception given Weber's ideas by these scholars, two important French historians who devoted much of their scholarly life to studying the Reformation but who were not themselves Protestants – both of them particularly receptive to the inspiration of the social sciences – found his theses far more convincing. In 1931, Henri Hauser, the great pioneer of early modern French social and working-class history (and a Jew), explored Calvin's economic ideas in an essay that suggested that Protestantism was an important stimulus to capitalism because of the originality of its formal teachings on usury.¹⁶ Three years later, in an essay first published in the Protestant periodical *Foi et vie*, an even more influential figure in reshaping the course of modern historiography, Lucien Febvre, offered a positive assessment of the Reformation's contribution to the growth of capitalism through its abolition of extraworldly asceticism and its stimulus of an appetite for work.¹⁷ Despite the great influence of these two figures, however, their interest in this subject was only weakly transmitted to the next generation of *Annales* historians. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's great thesis on the peasants of Languedoc did include some memorable pages devoted to Olivier de Serres, suggesting that his agronomical writings display the Protestant ethic at work, but when a French translation of *The Protestant Ethic* finally appeared in 1964, the review of it by Febvre's most faithful disciple, Robert Mandrou, underscored the dated appearance of its methods and the extent to which the considerable response it evoked among so much of the broad educated public derived from the aura of scientific legitimacy it conferred upon old commonplaces about the superiority of Protestantism to Catholicism. Only when scholars looked at the actual practice of lending and capital investment in Protestant and Catholic countries and the economic activities of religious minorities across the continent, Man-

15 Charles Weiss, *Histoire des réfugiés protestants de France*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1853), I, 30.

16 Henri Hauser, "Les idées économiques de Calvin," orig. pub. in *Les débuts du capitalisme* (Paris, 1931), repr. in *La modernité du XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1963), 105–133, esp. 133.

17 Lucien Febvre, "Capitalisme et réforme," repr. in *Pour une histoire à part entière* (Paris, 1962).

drou argued, would it become possible to say whether or not these theses had any genuine scientific validity.¹⁸

That work never came. Over the past fifteen years, however, one important French Protestant historian who has written extensively on religious history has begun to assert Protestantism's particularly dynamic contribution to economic growth. This is Pierre Chaunu, significantly, a mid-life convert to the faith rather than a Huguenot by ancestry.¹⁹ Chaunu unquestionably qualifies as one of the most boldly idiosyncratic historians to achieve professional eminence in any country since the professionalization of the discipline in the late nineteenth century. His vast flood of publications is characterized by oracular pronouncements in which the voice of the natalist prophet warning of the imminent suicide of the civilized races increasingly competes with that of the secular historian, considerable insouciance about documentation, and a prose style that verges on automatic writing. All of these characteristics are evident in his statements about Calvinism's important role in promoting economic progress in his 1975 textbook, *Le Temps des Réformes*, reiterated in his 1986 *L'Aventure de la Réforme*. According to these works, numerous studies have confirmed the link between Protestantism and economic progress, as does the tight correlation between Protestant nations and those nations that first entered the Rostowian takeoff phase. This association derives from "social and cultural mediating factors, and mental factors more difficult to grasp, touching on attitudes toward life, the place actually granted contemplation, in a word to religious values which are not directly reducible to social consequences and, ultimately, to the psychological density of hopes for the kingdom of God."²⁰ Because he is one of the most visible media stars among the French professorate (he is a regular contributor to *Le Figaro* and appeared frequently on "Apostrophes" during the life of that enormously popular televised discussion program), Chaunu's views may well exercise a degree of influence over the perceptions of the broad

18 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (Paris, 1969), 190–193; Robert Mandrou, "Capitalisme et protestantisme: La science et le mythe," *Revue Historique*, 235 (1966), 101–106, esp. 106.

19 Chaunu discusses the evolution of his religious beliefs in "Auto-histoire" in his *Retrohistoire* (Paris, 1985), 38. The dust jacket of his *Le Temps des Réformes* (Paris, 1975) indicates that, in addition to teaching history at the Sorbonne, he has taught theology at the Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformiste in Aix-en-Provence.

20 Pierre Chaunu, *Le Temps des Réformes* (Paris, 1975), pp. 474ff (the passage cited comes from p. 476 of this work); "Le destin de la Réforme" in Chaunu et al., *L'Aventure de la Réforme. Le monde de Jean Calvin* (Paris, 1986).

reading public. They have exercised less demonstrable influence as yet over the work of his fellow historians.

Having said that Weber's ideas have had little impact on the research agendas shaping the main stream of historical writing about European Calvinism and having tried to suggest some of the reasons why, it is time now to begin surveying the exceptions to this statement. Firstly, there is one path-breaking book written by a historian about a country other than England in which a broad Weberian perspective does shape the interpretation of Calvinism: the remarkable *History of the Scottish People* by T. C. Smout. This pioneering foray through Scottish social history includes some illuminating pages on the character of Reformed discipline based upon research in original sources clearly inspired in part by Weber's hypotheses, and it concludes that the Reformation helped pave the way for Scotland's later economic development by promoting education, sobriety, industriousness, and above all "the need . . . to work compulsively and systematically to some positive purpose." Smout is professor of Scottish history at the University of Saint Andrews, and one wonders if his incorporation of such a viewpoint does not reflect his geographic and professional distance from the historiography of the continental Reformation and the more direct inspiration of English social historians.²¹

Secondly, *The Protestant Ethic*'s rapid attainment of canonical status within sociology has meant that a number of social scientists have attempted to specify a clear research program on the basis of their reading of Weber and to examine the history of Calvinism in one country in the light of that program. A particularly important study in this vein has been carried out for Scotland by the sociologist Gordon Marshall.²² Smaller similar studies have been done for the Low Countries by the sociologist Jelle Riemersma and the economic historian J. H. van Stuijvenberg.²³ If their work has revealed the difficulties of turning Weber's aperçus and ideal types into a clear set

21 T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560–1830* (London, 1969), ch. 3, esp. 96–100. The passage cited appears on p. 98. See the considerably more critical judgment of Weber's ideas by the prominent church historian G. D. Henderson, "Religion and Democracy in Scottish History," in *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh, 1957), 136, a further reflection of the chilly response to his ideas in Reformed theological circles.

22 Gordon Marshall, *Presbyteries and Profits: Calvinism and the Development of Capitalism in Scotland, 1560–1707* (Oxford, 1980).

23 Jelle C. Riemersma, *Religious Factors in Early Dutch Capitalism 1550–1650* (The Hague, 1967); J. H. van Stuijvenberg, "The Weber Thesis: An Attempt at Interpretation," *Acta Historiae Neerlandicae*, VIII (1975), 50–66.

of empirically testable hypotheses, it has also shown that a research program that takes his writings as its explicit starting point can lead scholars to explore aspects of the history of Calvinism neglected by those working within the mainstream national traditions of Calvinist historiography. Thus, Marshall's concern to determine whether or not Weber was right in asserting that the themes of predestination, the necessity of obtaining proof of one's election, and the need for due diligence in one's calling increasingly came to the fore in later Calvinism has given us the fullest exploration to date of Scottish sermons and devotional works of the post-Reformation generations, whereas Van Stuijvenberg's interest in determining whether or not Dutch Calvinistic piety emphasized systematic self-discipline has led him to discover the paucity of spiritual diaries and journals in that country. The final judgment of these works with regard to the validity of Weber's arguments is decidedly mixed. Marshall claims that the Scottish evidence vindicates Weber's arguments, Van Stuijvenberg finds little comfort for them in the Dutch case, and Riemersma takes the middle-of-the-road position that Reformed doctrine was a small contributing factor to a development that began long before the Reformation and gained most of its strength from other sources.

Thirdly, as has already been mentioned, England forms the great exception to the pattern just outlined. Here the Weber thesis, duly modified to fit national conditions, has entered into the main stream of historical writing and debate. R. H. Tawney unquestionably played the central role in this. For this churchgoing Anglican and advocate of a Christian socialism divorced from narrow confessionalism, the ethical teachings of the medieval and early Reformation church were an example of the proper limitation of economic activity by concern for the well-being of one's fellow man.²⁴ Tawney considered it an important historical problem to determine when and why the Church of England fell away from such teachings and into a more complacent acceptance of "the economic virtues." Weber was clearly an important stimulus for his thinking about this problem, which resulted in his extremely influential *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, first published in 1926 and, as I can testify from personal experience, still assigned in economic history courses four decades later. The book parts company with Weber in stressing that the development of religious practices and doctrines particularly favorable to

24 For my understanding of Tawney's life and thought, I have relied especially on Ross Terrill, *R. H. Tawney and His Times: Socialism as Fellowship* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973).

capitalist accumulation "owed as much to changes in economic and political organization as it did to developments in the sphere of religious thought."²⁵ It nonetheless incorporates a highly Weberian vision of the Puritan, that "contemner of the vain shows of sacramentalism" for whom "mundane toil itself becomes a kind of sacrament," driven to unresting activity to exorcise the haunting demon of uncertainty about election.²⁶ Last of all, it advances several related theses that would become enormously significant for subsequent work on Puritanism and society, namely, that Puritanism was above all the ideology of the middling sort of people, for whom it provided a significant reinforcement of the bourgeois virtues. Further elaborated by Tawney's pupil Christopher Hill, these claims have since become the object of the sort of intense empirical scrutiny and debate that is the fate of any bold thesis concerning early modern English history. David Underdown and Keith Wrightson and David Levine have carried out detailed local studies using sophisticated social history methods that link Puritan sentiment with the middling ranks and social control in the service of economic modernization. Nicholas Tyacke, Paul Seaver, and others have used perhaps even cleverer methods and more compelling evidence to suggest the difficulty of identifying the hotter sort of Protestants with any one specific social group or with religious practices favorable to the development of a capitalist mentality. The wisest judgment concerning such claims at the moment would seem to be that they remain unproven.²⁷

Thanks to the special importance that Weber assumed within American sociology and the emphasis in his work on the Puritans as paradigmatic later Calvinists, England has also been a favored terrain for social scientists working within a Weberian framework who have attempted historical studies reformulating or extending the master's insights. Robert Merton, David Little, Michael Walzer, and most

25 R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (13th printing, New York, 1954), 76–77.

26 *Ibid.*, 166.

27 I shall cite here only the major works relevant to this question. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London, 1964); Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525–1700* (New York, 1979); Nicholas Tyacke, "Popular Puritan Mentality in Late Elizabethan England," in Peter Clark, A. G. R. Smith, and Nicholas Tyacke, eds., *The English Commonwealth 1547–1640* (Leicester, 1979); Paul Seaver, "The Puritan Work Ethic Revisited," *Journal of British Studies* 19 (1979–1980): 35–53; Patrick Collinson, "Cranbrook and the Fletchers," in P. N. Brooks, ed., *Reformation Principle and Practice: Essays Presented to A. G. Dickens* (London, 1980), 173–202; *idem*, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1982), 239–241; David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985).

recently David Zaret have all attempted ambitious studies in historical sociology of this sort focusing upon the English Puritans.²⁸ If this literature stands somewhat apart from the main stream of research on the religious history of Tudor and Stuart England, it too has stimulated criticism and refinement, and thus has contributed to the far greater influence of Weberian themes within the historiography of early modern English religious life than that concerned with Calvinism anywhere else in Europe.

The fourth qualification that must be made to the claim that the Weber thesis has only marginally influenced the historiography of Calvinism reveals that it has not necessarily been Weber's own ideas that have generated the most active research. Weber explicitly stated that he was not concerned with the formal ethics of the different Christian churches and their implementation, but with "the influence of those psychological sanctions which, originating in religious belief and the practice of religion, gave a direction to practical conduct and held the individual to it." Despite this disclaimer, the discussion of his ideas quickly came to encompass a great deal of discussion of the specific social and economic doctrines of Calvin and later Calvinists — not simply in England, where Tawney's work has sparked a lot of subsequent work on this question,²⁹ but on the Continent as well. A significant literature now exists on Calvin's social and economic ideas, capped by the massive work of the Genevan pastor-historian André Biéler.³⁰ Important studies have also been devoted to the social and economic ideas of Dutch and French Reformed theologians.³¹ More recently, studies using church discipline records to examine the implementation of Calvinist morality in prac-

28 Robert K. Merton, "Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth-Century England," *Osiris*, IV (1938), 360–632; Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origin of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965); David Little, *Religion, Order, and Law: A Study in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York, 1969); David Zaret, *The Heavenly Contract: Ideology and Organization in Pre-Revolutionary Puritanism* (Chicago, 1985).

29 Hill, *Society and Puritanism*; Charles H. and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton, N.J., 1961); T. H. Breen, "The Non-Existent Controversy: Puritan and Anglican Attitudes on Work and Wealth, 1600–1640," *Church History*, XXXV (1966), 273–287; Seaver, "Puritan Work Ethic Revisited"; J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans, and the Two Tables 1620–1670* (New Haven, Conn., 1976).

30 The most important titles here are Doumergue, *Calvin*, V, 647–651; Hauser, "Idées économiques de Calvin"; and André Biéler, *La pensée économique et sociale de Calvin* (Geneva, 1959).

31 Ernst Beins, "Die Wirtschaftsethik der Calvinistischen Kirche der Niederlande 1565–1650," *Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, XXIV (1931), 82–156; Hartmut Kretzer, "Die Calvinismus-Kapitalismus-These Max Webers vor dem Hintergrund Französischer Quellen des 17. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, V (1978), 415–427. See

tice have proliferated, although whereas these speak to certain questions raised in the course of the Weber thesis debate, that debate has provided only a small part of the inspiration for them.³²

That the research of historians and theologians underwent this displacement away from the specific themes highlighted by Weber and toward the study of the actual economic and social ethics of Calvinism in theory and practice is not surprising. "In order to find our way through the tangle and occasionally even logomachy of these bold, at times brilliant, most often murky, theories, let us come at last to the question from which our historians and theologians ought to have started by examining and clarifying. What was the Calvinism of Calvin, normative Calvinism? What did Calvin think about wealth and its use?"³³ As this revealing excerpt from Emile Doumergue suggests, not only do the actual ethical teachings of the different churches provide a more familiar subject for theologically minded historians, and one more easily subject to concrete empirical investigation than psychological sanctions holding an individual to ethical conduct; in the eyes of modern Reformed theologians, Calvin's own teachings represent normative Calvinism, and their close study contributes to modern efforts to rethink the social ethics of Christianity. The dominant motif in twentieth-century Reformed theology, inspired by Karl Barth and, secondarily, Kuyper, has been the recovery of Calvin's thought as a source of inspiration. Biéler's now standard work was clearly inspired by the concern to distill from the master's writings the principles of a social ethic appropriate

also now Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York, 1987), esp. 326–334.

32 Alice C. Carter, *The English Reformed Church in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century* (Amsterdam, 1964), 157–158; Smout, *History of the Scottish People*, 79–87; E. William Monter, "The Consistory of Geneva, 1559–1569," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, XXXVIII (1976), 477, 484; Janine Garrisson-Estèbe and Bernard Vogler, "La genèse d'une société protestante. Etude comparée de quelques registres consistoriaux languedociens et palatins vers 1600," *Annales: E.S.C.*, XXXI (1976), 362–378; Heinz Schilling, "Reformierte Kirchenzucht als Sozialdisziplinierung? Die Tätigkeit des Emder Presbyteriums in den Jahren 1557–1562 (Mit vergleichenden Betrachtungen über die Kirchenräte in Groningen und Leiden sowie mit einem Ausblick ins 17. Jahrhundert)," in Schilling and W. Ehbrecht, eds., *Niederlande und Nordwestdeutschland: Studien zur Regional- und Stadtgeschichte Nordwestkontinentaleuropas im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit* (Cologne, 1983), 261–327; Matthieu Gerardus Spiertz, "Die Ausübung der Zucht in der IJsselstadt Deventer in den Jahren 1592–1619 im Vergleich zu den Untersuchungen im Languedoc und in der Kurpfalz," *Rheinische Vierteljahrsschriften*, IX (1985), 139–172, esp. 153; Raymond A. Mentzer, "Disciplina nervus ecclesiae: The Calvinist Reform of Morals at Nîmes," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XVIII (1987), 89–115; Jeffrey R. Watt, "The Reception of the Reformation in Valangin, Switzerland, 1547–1588," *ibid.*, XX (1989), 94; Herman Roodenburg, *Onder Censuur: De kerkelijke tucht in de gereformeerde gemeente van Amsterdam, 1578–1700* (Hilversum, 1990).

33 Doumergue, *Calvin*, V, 647.

to the contemporary world. As for the recent spate of studies of the actual implementation of consistorial discipline, this grows out of the concern with popular religion and the *chrétien quelconque d'autrefois* that is so pronounced in the religious history of the past two decades, as well as with the fascination of German historians with the themes of *Sozialdisziplinierung*.

What this literature has shown above all else is the profoundly ambivalent implications of Calvinist ethics for the accumulation of wealth. On the one hand, the doctrines set forth by Calvin and reiterated with remarkable consistency by subsequent Reformed theologians in the Netherlands, France, and England emphasized the obligation of assiduous labor in one's calling, warned against dissipation and drunkenness, and permitted some accommodation with capitalist business practices by freeing the discussion of usury from the context of Old Testament and Aristotelian precepts within which it had previously been confined. On the other hand, they denounced excessive attachment to the things of this world and the blind pursuit of Mammon, stressed that all dealings with one's fellow man must be tempered by love, and emphasized the Christian's obligation to act as a charitable steward of all wealth beyond that needed to maintain one in one's station. In practice, Reformed disciplinary bodies paid far less attention to economic sins than sexual ones, but cases of usury, overcharging customers, failure to pay debts, "sleepiness in calling," and bankruptcy all found their way onto the agenda of different churches' consistories.

Fifthly, a significant literature also exists around a second question that, like the preceding one, represents a specific, more narrowly focused aspect of the Weber thesis debate – although once again, preoccupation with this question is visible only within the scholarship devoted to English, or more properly Anglo-American, religious life. This is the question of the accuracy of Weber's specific interpretation of the psychology of Calvinism. His claim, of course, was that the centrality of the dogma of predestination within later Calvinism engendered intense anxieties among believers about whether or not they were among the elect. These anxieties, in turn, represented a particularly forceful sanction to moral behavior, since they impelled church members to try to prove to themselves through their moral rectitude that they indeed possessed saving faith. The relatively small amount of work devoted to late-sixteenth and seventeenth-century Calvinist spirituality on the Continent or in Scotland betrays no engagement

with these ideas, except in the studies of Marshall and Van Stuijvenberg that explicitly took Weber as their point of departure. By contrast, the literature on Anglo-American Puritanism is far richer in its exploration of the inner world of the faith, and the historiography of this subject is marked by an ongoing discussion of these themes. The dialogue is particularly important and explicit in the works of the generation of American historians active in the 1930s through the 1950s who did so much to recover Puritanism as a way of life and world of thought. M. M. Knappen's writings on Tudor Puritanism include several passages explicitly addressing what he saw as the oversimplifications contained in Weber's depiction of the psychology of Calvinism, whereas Perry Miller's exactly contemporaneous works resonate with Weberian images and suggest a far more positive evaluation of their accuracy.³⁴ (One chapter of his classic *The New England Mind* is even entitled "The Protestant Ethic.") Direct citation or refutation of Weber has become rarer in more recent work on early modern English theology, religious experience, or the Puritan anatomy of conscience, but it continues to recur.³⁵ More important, much of this literature can be read as an ongoing dialogue with Weberian themes. At the same time, it is worth observing that the richest discussions of this subject are precisely those that break away most completely from any Weberian ideal types – whether to confirm or to deny them – and instead generate an independent understanding of the

34 M. M. Knappen, ed., *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries* (Chicago, 1933), 10–16; idem, *Tudor Puritanism: A Chapter in the History of Idealism* (Chicago, 1939), ch. 17, esp. 348; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1939), esp. chs. 1–2, and *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), esp. ch. 3.

35 Among the most important recent works devoted to theology and piety in Old and New England are H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1958); Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York, 1963); C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (New York, 1966); Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York, 1972); C. J. Sommerville, *Popular Religion in Restoration England* (Gainesville, Fla., 1977); William K. B. Stoever, 'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven': *Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, Conn., 1978); Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978); McGee, *The Godly Man*; R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979); Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982); Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1982), esp. ch. 6; Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge, 1982); Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982); Paul Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, Calif., 1985); Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (Oxford, 1986). Explicit commentaries on Weber's ideas may be found in Watts, *The Dissenters*, 361–362, and Cohen, *God's Caress*, 112–119.

subject, using categories drawn from contemporaries' subjective understanding of their own experience.³⁶

How does Weber's understanding of Calvinism look in light of this work? Much of the evidence corresponds to Weber's depiction of Calvinism. It is now clear that predestination indeed came increasingly to the fore in Calvinist doctrinal statements and debates in the generations immediately following Calvin; that this development was accompanied in England by a proliferation of devotional manuals that made it one of their chief tasks to explain to believers how they could be sure they possessed saving faith; that one of the signs of faith highlighted by many of these devotional writers was upright behavior and honest dealing in one's calling; and that at the same time, these devotional manuals spelled out a series of procedures enabling believers to exercise a considerable degree of self-control over their behavior, including the regular monitoring of behavior through daily self-examination and even the maintenance of diaries of conscience.³⁷

It is also clear, however, that if these preoccupations appeared together in the writings of the early Puritan "physicians of the soul," they were not necessarily interlinked parts of a single logical system, nor did they arise simply as the consequence of the increasing centrality of the doctrine of predestination. Devotional manuals continued to insist upon the importance of making one's election sure and to offer strict guidelines for daily behavior throughout the seventeenth century, even as support for strict predestinarian ideas waned in many circles. Indeed, by the Restoration era, Anglican or anti-predestinarian dissenting devotional writers were even more prone to emphasize upright behavior as a sign of election than their more rigidly predestinarian counterparts.³⁸ Furthermore, good works were only one, and by no means the most consistently important, sign of election adduced by devotional writers throughout this period.³⁹ Finally, and perhaps most important, the copious literature of practical divinity devoted to these questions that was found in England was by no means a general attribute of European Calvinism.

36 I am thinking here in particular of the work of Hambrick-Stowe and Collinson.

37 William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, 1938); Porter, *Reformation and Reaction*; Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin* (Appleford, Berks., 1966), 19-37; Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), 432-437; Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*; Watkins, *The Puritan Experience*.

38 Allison, *Rise of Moralism*; Sommerville, *Popular Religion*, esp. 89.

39 Cohen, *God's Caress*, pp. 117-118, makes this point with particular clarity.

It was partially and selectively assimilated in parts of continental Europe through the spread of a Reformed pietism that drew much of its inspiration from the English example. But in much of Reformed Europe, a devotional life embracing the style and preoccupations of Puritan piety simply does not appear to have developed in the century and a half following the Reformation.⁴⁰ Its development in England appears to have stemmed less from certain psychological consequences inexorably unfolding from theological principles particularly suited to engendering them than from the elaboration of a pastoral strategy and a style of piety that built upon materials not only common to all European Calvinism but also distinctive to earlier English Protestant thought, and that was specifically adapted to the circumstances within which those English theologians committed to the ideals of the continental Reformed tradition found themselves in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.⁴¹

This final observation suggests one additional reason why such a sharp divergence consistently recurs between the extent to which *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* has shaped the historiography of Anglo-American Puritanism and the degree of influence it has exercised on historical writing about all other variants of Western European Calvinism. A simple glance at Weber's footnotes makes it clear that, to the extent that he relied on primary sources to construct his picture of Calvinist piety, he relied above all on English devotional materials – materials for which there was often little continental analogue. For scholars of Calvinism outside of England, Weber's depiction of the faith consequently corresponded to little in the sources with which they were familiar, and they had at their disposal few of the sorts of remarkable sources that exist in such abundance for England and that have served to stimulate so much

40 Much of my current research is concerned with mapping the diffusion of different styles of Calvinist piety. For now, some signposts may be found in Wilhelm Goeters, *Die Vorbereitung des Pietismus in der Reformierten Kirche der Niederlande bis zur Labadistischen Krisis 1670* (Leipzig, 1911); W. J. op 't Hof, *Engelse pietistische geschriften in het Nederlands, 1598–1622* (Rotterdam, 1987); Henri Vuilleumier, *Histoire de l'Eglise réformée du pays de Vaud sous le régime bernois*, 4 vols (Lausanne, 1927–), II, ch. 4; Kretzer, "Calvinismus-Kapitalismus-These Max Webers vor dem Hintergrund Französischer Quellen"; Benedict, "Bibliothèques protestantes et catholiques à Metz au XVIIe siècle," *Annales: E.S.C.* (1985), 343–370; idem, "La pratique religieuse huguenote: quelques aperçus messins et comparatifs" in François-Yves Le Moigne and Gérard Michaux, eds., *Protestants messins et mosellans, XVIe–XXe siècles* (Metz, 1988), 93–105.

41 See here the suggestive observations of Collinson, "Towards a Broader Understanding of the Early Dissenting Tradition," in *Godly People: Essays in English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), 539; Zaret, *Heavenly Contract*, esp. chs. 4 and 5.

work on Puritan religiosity there, most notably personal autobiographies and diaries of conscience, which might have allowed them to investigate the accuracy of Weber's contentions about Calvinism's distinctive impact upon its believers. When this is combined with the vast gulf between his intellectual preoccupations and theirs, the tendency of so much twentieth-century Reformed theology to draw inspiration from the recovery of the historical Calvin, and consequently to ignore the subsequent Reformed tradition of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and, for those of the francophone world of the early twentieth century, the uncomfortable echoes in his ideas of contemporary anti-Protestant propaganda, it is hardly surprising that his ideas should have met with so much incomprehension and exercised so little influence. In England, on the other hand, the extraordinary richness of the sources close in character to those Weber used, not to mention the fact that Calvin himself stands as far less of a normative reference point for modern English theologians, have guaranteed a far more continuous conversation between those working in these sources and his writings.

In conclusion, then, we can see that the reception of Weber's ideas has been shaped by a series of factors: disciplinary traditions, changing motivations and concerns inspiring the writing of religious history, the relationship of different modern European churches to the Calvinist tradition as a source of contemporary inspiration, and, last but not least, the extent to which the available sources provide a solid ground for discussing Weber's theses and appear to bear them out. Today, very little work on Scottish, Dutch, or francophone Calvinism betrays the imprint of a Weberian perspective, and some of the work that does commands little respect among most specialists in the field. This, however, stems less from the failure of attempts written in such a vein to prove convincing than from the paucity of attempts even to try to investigate Weber's ideas seriously in these contexts. By contrast, debate about the possibility that Puritanism has been a progressive force in early modern English history has been ongoing and intense for the past fifty years. This observer of the discussion would find too strong claims in that sense unconvincing, but others might well disagree. The substantial amount of work on the formal economic and social ethics of Calvinism has clearly shown the profound ambivalence of these teachings with regard to the accumulation of wealth, but there can be little doubt that the ethics of the faith, insofar as they were internalized by ordinary believers,

promoted sobriety, self-discipline, and regular labor. Finally, the abundant work on Puritan spirituality suggests elements of insight in Weber's discussion of the psychology of Calvinism, but also indicates that he overestimated the extent to which the different aspects of behavior that he identified as typical of the faith were necessarily linked to strict predestinarian doctrine and characterized Calvinist religiosity as a whole, rather than simply one strand within it. But perhaps the most important change in determining contemporary assessments of the plausibility of Weber's Protestant ethic thesis has not come from historians of European Calvinism at all. It has come from a broader recognition within the entire community of religious historians of early modern Europe – a community that is now far less divided along confessional lines than it once was – that much of what Weber diagnosed as the distinctive contribution of Protestant or Calvinist religiosity to the making of the modern world was in fact a more broadly shared feature of the early modern religious landscape. This recognition, of course, opens up another possible manner for religious historians of this period to be Weberians: through an identification and exploration of those transformations in religious practice promoting self-discipline and the rationalization of behavior that cut across the spectrum of confessional groups. The exploration of the potential of this sort of Weberianism has scarcely begun.⁴² At the same time, this recognition highlights how much Weber's essay was a product of the confessional rivalries and prejudices of the specific time and place in which it was written, not to mention of Weber's own critical attitude toward Germany's Lutheran inheritance, to which the Reformed tradition constituted in his eyes a superior alternative.

42 But see Lehmann, *Zeitalter des Absolutismus*, ch. 3, sect. 5.

**PUBLICATIONS OF THE GERMAN
HISTORICAL INSTITUTE**
Washington, D.C.

Edited by Detlef Junker
with the assistance of Daniel S. Mattern

The historical relationship between Protestantism, capitalism, and democracy remains a controversial intellectual theme. Max Weber's famous thesis about the link between a "Protestant ethic" and the "spirit of capitalism" and its dissolution in his own era has been both widely acclaimed and heatedly disputed ever since its publication in 1904-5. The essay's manifold intellectual dimensions have made it an enduring part of the discourse on modernity that reaches far beyond the issue of its historical factuality. The thesis has always been concerned as much with the seventeenth-century roots of the modern world as with the spiritual state of America and Europe before the First World War.

This collection of essays approaches the Weber thesis and the vast literature it has spawned from two distinct vantage points. It illuminates theological, philosophical, political, and biographical aspects of Weber's thought that have previously been little understood and possibly unknown, and it continues to sum up our present knowledge of the elusive historical evidence and methodological complexities involved in assessing the viability of such a comprehensive theory.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

ISBN 0-521-55829-8



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