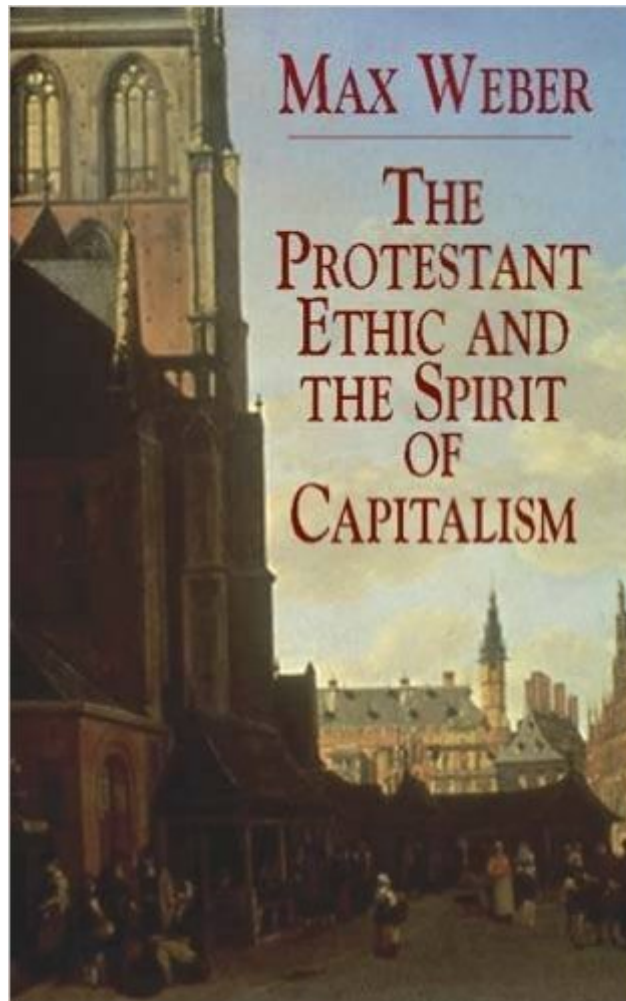


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The Protestant Ethic And The Spirit Of Capitalism (Economy Editions)



Synopsis

The Protestant ethic â ” a moral code stressing hard work, rigorous self-discipline, and the organization of one's life in the service of God â ” was made famous by sociologist and political economist Max Weber. In this brilliant study (his best-known and most controversial), he opposes the Marxist concept of dialectical materialism and its view that change takes place through "the struggle of opposites." Instead, he relates the rise of a capitalist economy to the Puritan determination to work out anxiety over salvation or damnation by performing good deeds â ” an effort that ultimately discouraged belief in predestination and encouraged capitalism. Weber's classic study has long been required reading in college and advanced high school social studies classrooms.

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Customer Reviews

Rather than a general theory or explanation of either economics or religion, Weber attempts to draw a specific link between what he sees as the conjunction of the work ethic of Protestant (mainly Calvinist) spiritual teachings, and the success of Western European Capitalism. Weber is an astute analyst, in many ways. He rightly notes that often the 'sine qua non' of Capitalism is thought of as "greed". Arguing against this notion, Weber points out that all societies have had greedy people within their particular economic system-greed is thus a factor irrespective of economic systems. Replacing this, Weber proposes that the "spirit" of Capitalism be thought of as a particular moral

attitude towards work and idleness-an attitude that holds that constant and diligent work for its own sake is a moral imperative. In the face of what Weber calls "the radical elimination of magic from the world" this work ethic was the existential option left for people in terms of atonement and personal compensation for inadequacies. I believe that these two insights are right on target. If there is a weakness involved in his characterization of this Protestant "Ethic," it lies in the fact that Weber attempts to draw a strict dichotomy in the origins of this ethic. He states forcefully that this ethic does not come out of any Enlightenment thought. The problem with trying to separate this ethic from the Enlightenment, is that this ethic which posits diligent work for its own sake is clearly found in the ethics of Immanuel Kant, who classified this kind of work and labor as a "duty" (ethical rule) that the self has to itself. In other words, how much of this is the legacy of the Reformation and how much of this is the legacy of the Enlightenment?

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