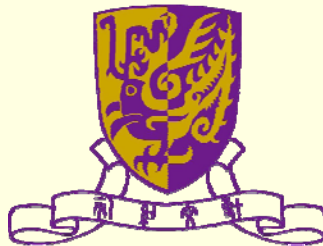

Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

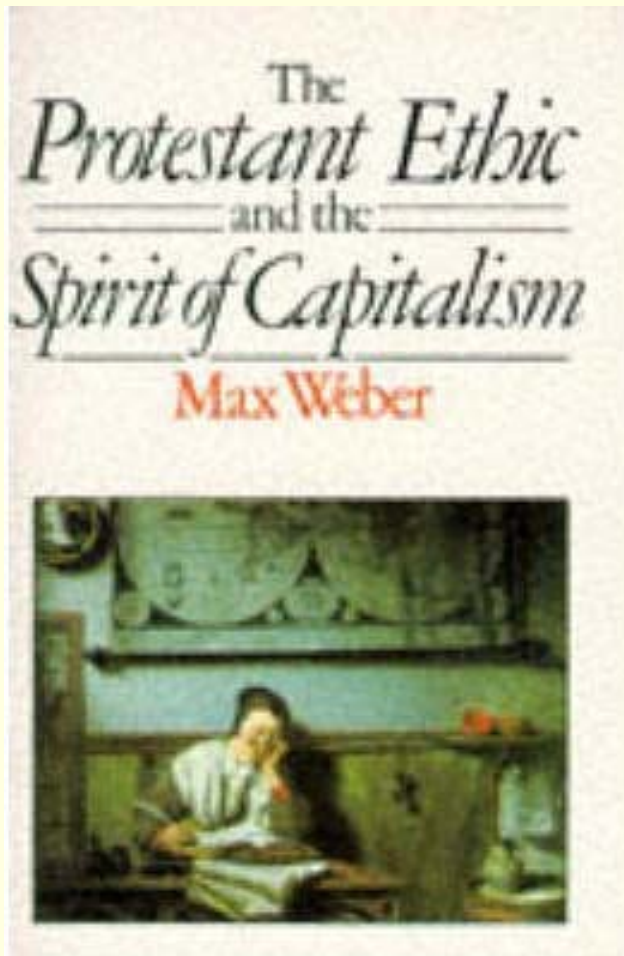


Chan Wai Leung

**Office of University General Education
The Chinese University of Hong Kong**



The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (PESC)



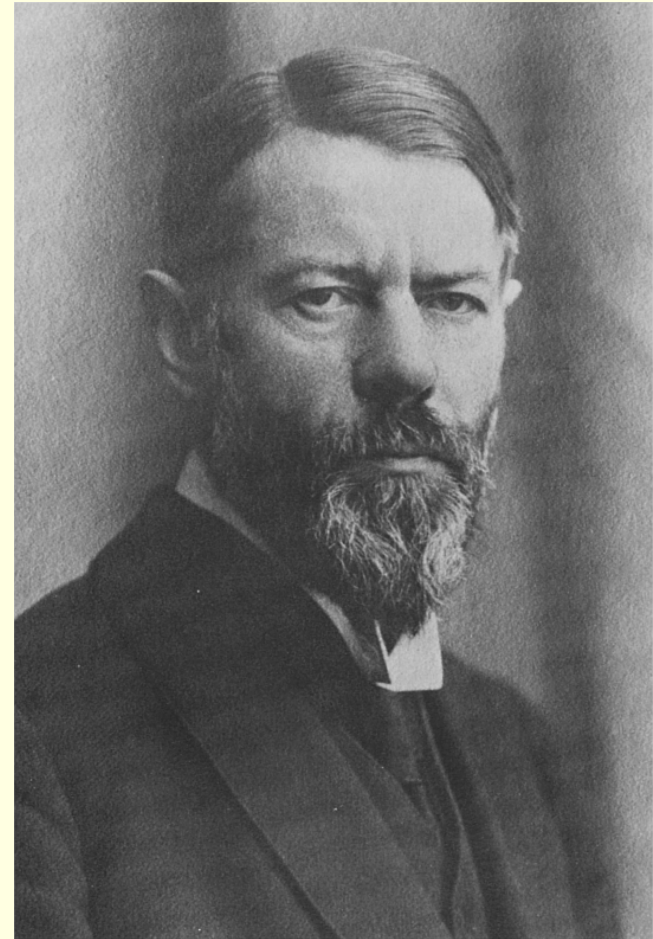
- Translated by Talcott Parsons, an American sociologist.
- First published in 1930

The background

- The rise of modern society as a central question in social sciences and humanities disciplines
- Max Weber had produced a large corpus of work in dealing with this question: *PESC, The religion of China, The religion of India, Ancient Judaism, and General Economic History.*

The Author

- Max Weber (1864 – 1920)
- German Sociologist
- trained in law, history, and economics
- Interested in the history, economic and national policy
- studies on world religions, economic and politics



Life Events (I)

1864	Born in Erfurt
1882	Studies at the University of Heidelberg
1883	Studies at the University of Strasbourg
1884	Studies at the Berlin University
1889	Obtained doctoral degree with the work, <i>“Development of the Principle of Joint Liability and the Separate Fund in the Public Trading Company from the Household and Trade Communities in the Italian Cities “</i>

Life Events (II)

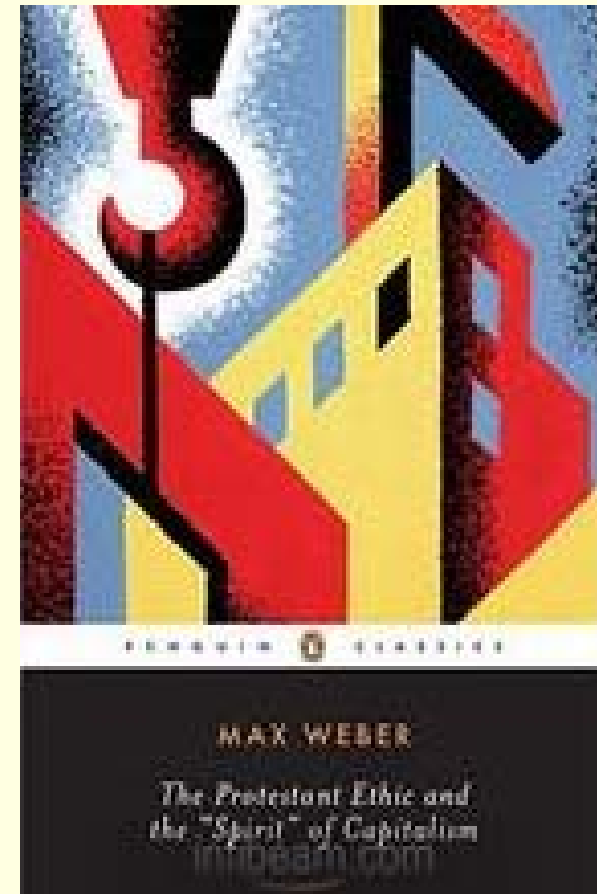
1891	<i>Habilitation “Roman Agrarian History and its Importance for State and Civil Law”</i>
1892	Extraordinary Professorship in Commercial and German Law at Berlin University
1894	Professor in Economics, University of Freiburg
1896	Chair in Economics, University of Heidelberg
1897 - 1903	Mental breakdown, therapy, recovery and relapse
1904 - 1905	The publication of <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (PESC)

- Published as a two-part article in an academic journal *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozial Politik*
- The article was later revised and published as the first part of *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religions*
- The current monograph edition is based on the 1920 revised version

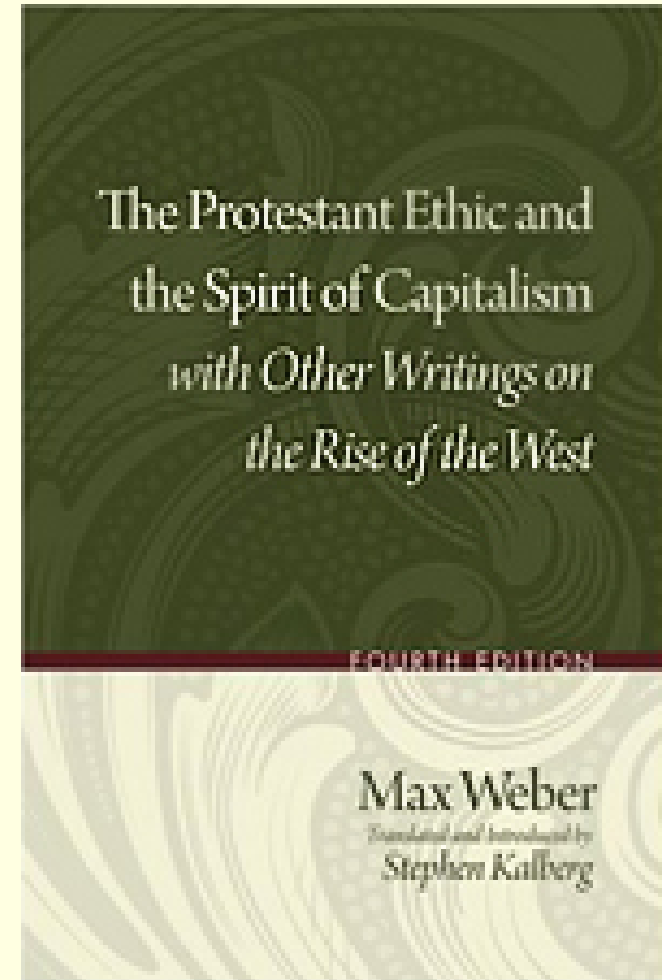
New Translations (I)

- Edited, translated, and with an introduction by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells.
- 2002. The Protestant ethic and the "spirit" of capitalism and other writings. New York : Penguin Books.
- Translation based on the 1904-05 Journal edition



New Translation (II)

- Translated and introduced by Stephen Kalberg
- 2009. The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism with other writings on the rise of the West. New York : Oxford University Press.
- A revised edition of Parsons' 1930 Translation



The Problem

- The dominance of Protestants in the occupations of Capitalist entrepreneurs and senior industrial workers
 - With reference to a quantitative study by Offenbacher, who was Weber's student, "Confession and Social Strata, a Study on the Economic Position of Catholics and Protestant in Baden."
- Investigate the relationship between Protestantism and capitalist way of life

Cultural Historical Background

- The dominance of Christianity in the History of Europe
- The rise and expansion of Christianity in the Ancient Europe
- The corruption of Christianity in the Middle Age
- Reformation and the rise of Protestantism

The expansion and corruption of Christianity in the Middle Age

- The spread of Christianity in Europe from first to fourth centuries
- The establishment of Christianity as State religion in 380
- The Fall of Western Roman Empire (476)
- The continuing development of Christianity
 - The conversion of Germanic Kings

The corruption of Christianity in the Middle Age

- The alliance and conflict with Kings and Emperors
- The pursuit of secular power of the Catholic Church
 - Crusade (11th – 13th Centuries)
 - Inquisition (12th – 13th Centuries)
 - The use and abuse of Indulgence (11th – 16th Century)

The Reformation

- A religious movement taken place in 16th century Europe
- A group of Christian leaders challenged the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church
- Prominent leaders
 - Martin Luther
 - John Calvin
- Protestantism and Catholicism dominant in different regions of Europe

Intellectual Approach

- Based on his interpretive methodology
 - Emphasize Interpretive understanding
 - Exploring the meaning of action of social actor
- Focus of study: the capitalists' economic action as well as meanings and their relationship with Protestantism

The spirit of capitalism

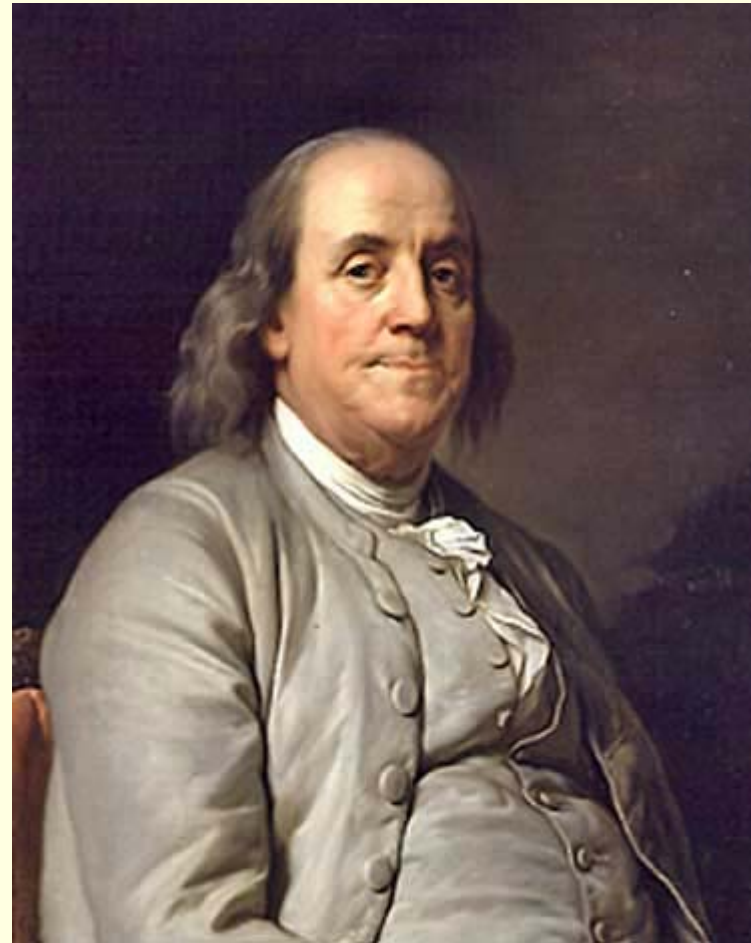
- The term “spirit” does not only entail the subjective dimension of the actor.
- The exploration in the subjective dimension could facilitate us to understand the actual daily of life of the capitalists.
- The term “spirit of capitalism” denotes a particular way of life that corresponding to the social institutions of capitalism

The spirit of capitalism and the capitalist social institution

- Weber argues that the first generation of capitalist endowed with the spirit of capitalism.
- Benjamin Franklin as the model that embodies the spirit of capitalism

Benjamin Franklin

- 1706-1790
- One of the significant figures in the independence of USA
- A famous American businessman, politician, writer, scientist, inventor...
- The ideal model of American way of life



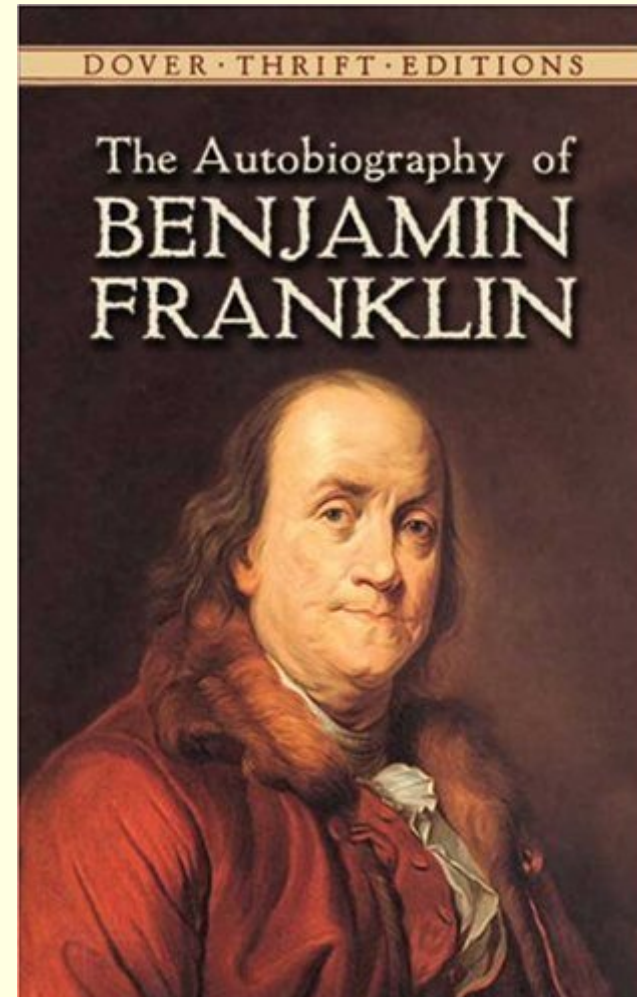
The legacy of Franklin



The USA \$100 Bill

The legacy of Franklin

- *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*
- First Edition published in 1793
- *Advice to a Young Tradesman*
 - A pamphlet written by Franklin



Initiatives in Money-making

- “Remember, that *time is money*. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon that the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides.”
- “Remember, that *credit is money*. If a man lets his money lie in my hands after it is due, he gives me interest, or so much as I can make of it during that time. This amounts to a considerable sum where a man has good and large credit, and makes good use of it.

Initiatives in Money-making

- "Remember, that *money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on.* Five shillings turned is six, turned again it is seven and three pence, and so on, till it becomes a hundred pounds. *The more there is of it, the more it produces every turning, so that the profits rise quicker and quicker.* He that kills a breeding sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation. He that murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds." (p.49)

Hard-working as a virtue

- "He that idly loses five shillings' worth of time, loses five shillings, and might as prudently throw five shillings into the sea.
- "He that loses five shillings, not only loses that sum, but all the advantage that might be made by turning it in dealing, which by the time that a young man becomes old, will amount to a considerable sum of money." (p.50)

Deliberate planning as a virtue

- "Beware of thinking all your own that you possess, and of living accordingly. It is a mistake that many people who have credit fall into. To prevent this, keep an exact account for some time both of your expenses and your income. If you take the pains at first to mention particulars, it will have this good effect: you will discover how wonderfully small, trifling expenses mount up to large sums, and will discern what might have been, and may for the future be saved, without occasioning any great inconvenience." (p.50)

The spirit of capitalism as a special kind of ethic

- “the *summum bonum* of his ethic, the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life, is above all completely devoid of any eudaemonistic, not to say hedonistic, admixture. It is thought of so purely as an end in itself, that from the point of view of the happiness of, or utility to, the single individual, it appears entirely transcendental and absolutely irrational.... This reversal of what we should call the natural relationship, so irrational from a naive point of view, is evidently as definitely a leading principle of capitalism...” (p.53)

The practical implication of the spirit of capitalism

- Capitalism is not just money-making, but also an ethics that justifies and promotes the activities of money-making.
- The functioning of capitalism is based on a particular way of life, which is of moral basis for its justification
- Weber named the capitalist way of life as the “spirit of capitalism”

The spirit of capitalism as a breakthrough from traditionalism

- Weber named the value and attitudes toward economic activities in pre-capitalist Europe as economic traditionalism
- The development of capitalism is a result of the breakthrough in the overcoming of economic traditionalism.

Economic Traditionalism

- `A man does not "by nature" wish to earn more and more money, but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for that purpose. Wherever modern capitalism has begun its work of increasing the productivity of human labor by increasing its intensity, it has encountered the immensely stubborn resistance of this leading trait of pre-capitalistic labor.' (p.60)

Religious foundation of Economic Traditionalism in Medieval Europe

- The economic ethic of Catholicism in Medieval Europe
- Catholicism sanctions on religious activities within the domain of church.
- The purpose of economic activities is to satisfy basic human needs.
- Secular work was just an unavoidable activity that were valueless in religious term.

The contrast of the economic ethic in the case of Franklin

- “The earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the result and the expression of **virtue and proficiency in a calling**; and this virtue and proficiency are, as it is now not difficult to see, the **real Alpha and Omega of Franklin's ethic**, as expressed in the passages we have quoted, as well as in all his works without exception. ” (p.53-4)

The religious basis of Franklin's ethic

- “*why* should "money be made out of men",
- “Benjamin Franklin himself, ..., answers in his autobiography with a quotation from the Bible, which his strict Calvinistic father drummed into him again and again in his youth: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" (Prov. xxii. 29). (p.53)

Weber's search for the source of the spirit of capitalism

- “What was the background of ideas which could account for the sort of activity apparently directed toward profit alone as a calling toward which the individual feels himself to have an ethical obligation?” (p.75)

The source of the spirit of capitalism

- Reformation as the intellectual source of the spirit of capitalism
- New Christian confessions were founded by these leaders, which are known as Protestantism
 - Martin Luther – Lutheran Church
 - John Calvin – Reformed Church
- New theologies were articulated, which fostered the ethical ideas Weber called the Protestant Ethic
 - The idea of calling
 - The doctrine of Predestination
- The Catholic economic ethics was replaced by the Protestant one where Protestantism was prevalent.

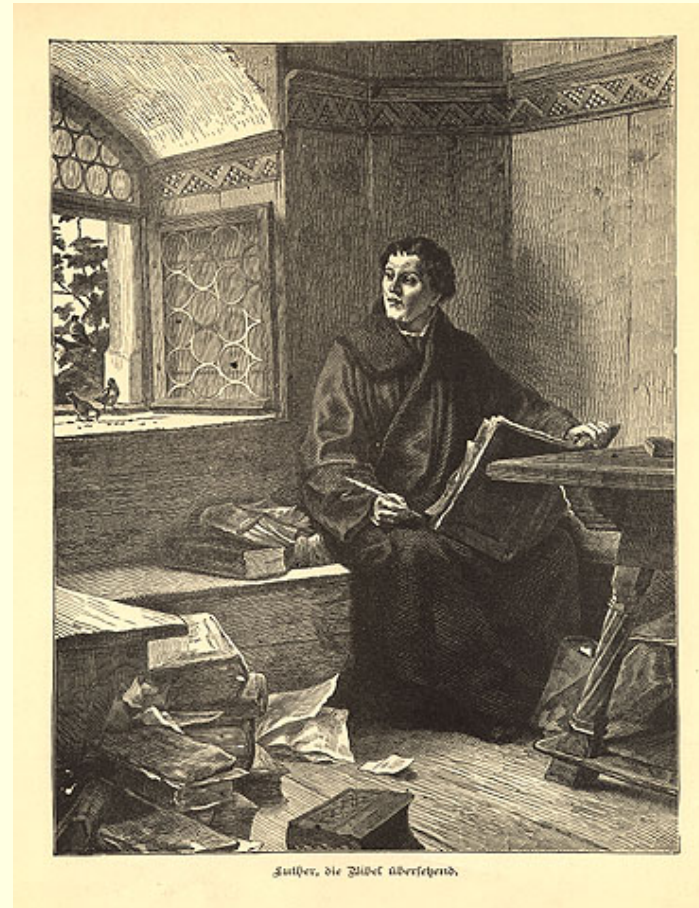
The idea of calling

- Originated in the theology of Martin Luther
- Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), German Reformer
- Produced a great body of theological writing, including the German translation of Bible



Luther's development of the idea of calling

- Adopting the German word *Beruf*, for the translation of work in German Bible
- *Beruf* denotes the idea of secular work as a calling, a task in the secular world assigned by God



The idea of calling

- “the valuation of the **fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form** which the moral activity of the individual could assume. This it was which inevitably gave everyday worldly activity a **religious significance**, and which first created the conception of calling in this sense.... The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling.” (p.85)

The work ethic of Lutheran theology

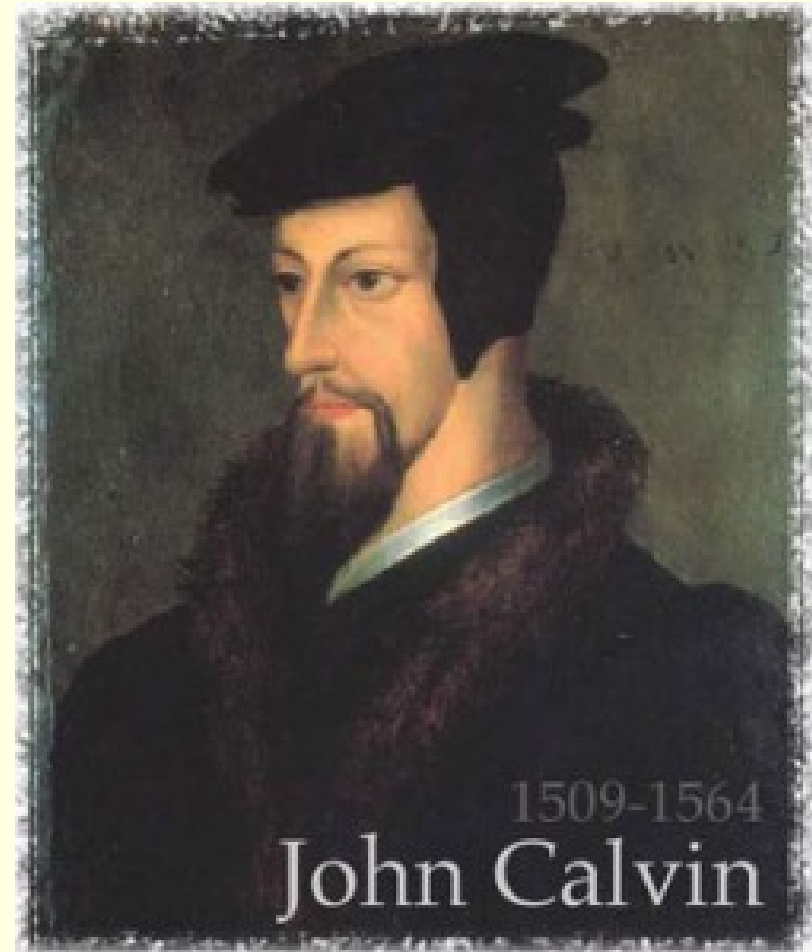
- Secular work is assigned by God
- The duty of human is to obey God's order and performing well in one's vocation, while accepting the world order as they are.

The idea of calling – the implications and limitation

- Secular work as a sacred endeavor for Protestants
- Sacred domain is established beyond the church
- Practical implication: Secular work acquired a theological justification
- Limitation: believers accept their secular works from God in a passive way. The economic ethic is still traditionalistic in nature

The doctrine of Predestination

- Originated in the theology of Calvin
- John Calvin(1509-1564), French theologian
- A Protestant Reformer worked in Geneva, Switzerland
- A brand of Protestant inherited his theology is named Puritan



The doctrine of Predestination: the tenets

- Human is sinful and cannot achieve salvation by one's own strength.
- Only God could grant salvation to human. The salvation and damnation of people were predestinated by God before the creation of the world.

The doctrine of Predestination: the tenets

- The selection is only based on God's own will. No secular criterion is applied to the selection. Human effort is also irrelevant to one's fate.
- Human is of no knowledge of his salvation or damnation.
- The ultimate purpose of human existence is for the glory of God.
 - Westminster Catechism
 - Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?
A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

The practice implied in the doctrine of predestination

- Believers of this doctrine could only trust their status of salvation and live as tools of God for his glory.
- Doubt about one's status and the decision of God is regarded as sinful and precisely reflect the damnation of the ones who doubt.
- The psychological consequence of this doctrine upon Puritans: inner loneliness.

The Inner loneliness of Puritan

- “In what was for the man of the age of the Reformation the most important thing in life, his eternal salvation, he was **forced to follow his path alone to meet a destiny** which had been decreed for him from eternity. No one could help him. No priest,... No sacraments... No Church, ... Finally, even no God. For even Christ had died only for the elect, for whose benefit God had decreed His martyrdom from eternity.” (p.104)

The existential problem for Puritan

- “The question, **Am I one of the elect?** must sooner or later have arisen for every believer and have forced all other interests into the background. And **how can I be sure of this state of grace?**” (p.110)

Pastoral advices on this question

- “it is held to be an absolute duty **to consider oneself chosen**, and to combat all doubts as temptations of the devil, since lack of self-confidence is the result of insufficient faith, hence of imperfect grace.” (p.111)
- “in order to attain that self-confidence **intense worldly activity** is recommended as the most suitable means. It and it alone disperses religious doubts and gives the certainty of grace.” (p.112)

The significance of worldly activity

- If we now ask further, by what fruits the Calvinist thought himself able to identify true faith? the answer is: by **a type of Christian conduct which served to increase the glory of God**. Just what does so serve is to be seen in his own will as revealed either directly through the Bible or **indirectly through the purposeful order of the world which he has created**. (p.114)

The symbolic significance of worldly activity

- It was through the consciousness that his conduct ... rested on a power within himself working for the glory of God; that it is not only willed of God but rather done by God that he attained the highest good towards which this religion strove, **the certainty of salvation**.... Thus, however useless good works might be as a means of attaining salvation, for even the elect remain beings of the flesh, and everything they do falls infinitely short of divine standards , nevertheless, they are indispensable as a **sign of election**. They are the technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of **getting rid of the fear of damnation**.” (p.114-5)

The practical implication of Puritanism

- “The God of Calvinism demanded of his believers not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system .”
- The moral conduct of the average man was thus deprived of its planless and unsystematic character and subjected to a **consistent method for conduct as a whole....**”
(p.117)

Rationalization of human life

- “The life of the saint was directed solely toward a transcendental end, salvation. But precisely for that reason it was thoroughly rationalized in this world and dominated entirely by the aim to add to the glory of God on earth. ... Only a life guided by constant thought could achieve conquest over the state of nature. ... It was this rationalization which gave the Reformed faith its peculiar ascetic tendency....” (p.118)

Asceticism in Christianity

- “it has had a definitely **rational character** ... it has become emancipated from planless otherworldliness and irrational self-torture. It had developed a systematic method of rational conduct with the purpose of overcoming the *status naturae*, to free man from the power of irrational impulses and his dependence on the world and on nature. It attempted to subject man to the supremacy of **a purposeful will**, to bring his actions under **constant self-control** with a careful consideration of their ethical consequences. Thus it trained the monk, objectively, as a worker in the service of the kingdom of God, and thereby further, subjectively, assured the salvation of his soul. This **active self-control** ... was also the most important practical ideal of Puritanism.” (p.118-9)

The doctrine of proof and its connection with asceticism

- “But in the course of its development Calvinism added something positive to this, the idea of the necessity of **proving one's faith in worldly activity**. Therein it gave the broader groups of religiously inclined people a positive incentive to **asceticism**. By founding its ethic in the doctrine of predestination, it substituted for the spiritual aristocracy of monks outside of and above the world **the spiritual aristocracy of the predestined saints of God within the world.**” (p.121)

The formation of inner worldly asceticism

- “the man who ... lived a rational life in the religious sense was, and remained, alone the monk. ... Sebastian Franck struck the central characteristic of this type of religion when he saw the significance of the Reformation in the fact that now **every Christian had to be a monk all his life**. The drain of asceticism from everyday worldly life had been stopped by a dam, and those passionately spiritual natures which had formerly supplied the highest type of monk were now **forced to pursue their ascetic ideals within mundane occupations.**” (p.121)

The spread of Calvinist ideas

- The adoption of Calvinist ideas in various Protestant religious movements
- The Reformed church
- The German Pietism
- The Methodist movement in England
- The Baptist Sects in Europe and USA

The Calvinist pastoral advices

- The connection between Calvinist theology and the spirit of capitalism is found in the pastoral teaching of the pastors on the practice everyday life
- Richard Baxter as the prime example of the pastoral advices

Richard Baxter

- 1615-1691
- English Puritan Church leader
- *Christian Directory* (1673)
- *The Saints' everlasting rest* (1650)



Baxter's idea on wealth and work

- Wealth is a great danger, a temptation
- Sensual enjoyment is sinful
- Only work and activity would increase God's glory

Attitude towards wealth

- “**Wealth as such is a great danger**; its temptations never end and its pursuit is not only senseless as compared with the dominating importance of the Kingdom of God, but it is morally suspect.” (p.156-157)
- “The real moral objection is to relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, above all of distraction from the pursuit of a righteous life. In fact, **it is only because possession involves this danger of relaxation that it is objectionable at all.**” (p.157)

Against the waste of time

- “Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is infinitely short and precious to **make sure of one's own election**. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral condemnation.” (p.157-8)

The attitude toward work and activity

- “inactive contemplation is also valueless, or even directly reprehensible if it is at the expense of one's daily work. For **it is less pleasing to God than the active performance of His will in a calling.** Besides, Sunday is provided for that, and, according to Baxter, it is always those who are not diligent in their callings who have no time for God when the occasion demands it.” (p.158)

The attitude toward work and activity

- “wealth does not exempt anyone from the unconditional command. Even the wealthy shall not eat without working, for even though they do not need to labour to support their own needs, there is God's commandment which they, like the poor, must obey. For everyone without exception God's Providence has prepared a calling, which he should profess and in which he should labour. And **this calling is ... God's commandment to the individual to work for the divine glory.**” (p.159-160)

The attitude toward work and activity

- Labour is ... in particular the specific defence against all those temptations which Puritanism united under the name of the unclean life, whose role for it was by no means small.” (p.158)

The attitude toward sensual enjoyment

- “The **sexual asceticism** of Puritanism differs only in degree, not in fundamental principle, from that of monasticism.... For sexual intercourse is permitted, even within marriage, only as the means willed by God for the increase of His glory according to the commandment, "Be fruitful and Multiply." Along with a moderate vegetable diet and cold baths, the same prescription is given for all sexual temptations as is used against religious doubts and a sense of moral unworthiness: "Work hard in your calling." (p.158-159)

Maximization of reward as the fulfillment of calling

- "If God show you a way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way (without wrong to your soul or to any other), if you refuse this, and choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your calling, and you refuse to be God's steward, and to accept His gifts and use them for Him, when He requireth it: you may labour to be rich for God, though not for the flesh and sin." (p.162)

The rational character of labour

- “a man's life in his calling is an exercise in ascetic virtue, a proof of his state of grace through his conscientiousness, which is expressed in the care and method with which he pursues his calling. **What God demands is not labour in itself, but rational labour in a calling.** In the Puritan concept of the calling the emphasis is always placed on this methodical character of worldly asceticism.”
(p.161-2)

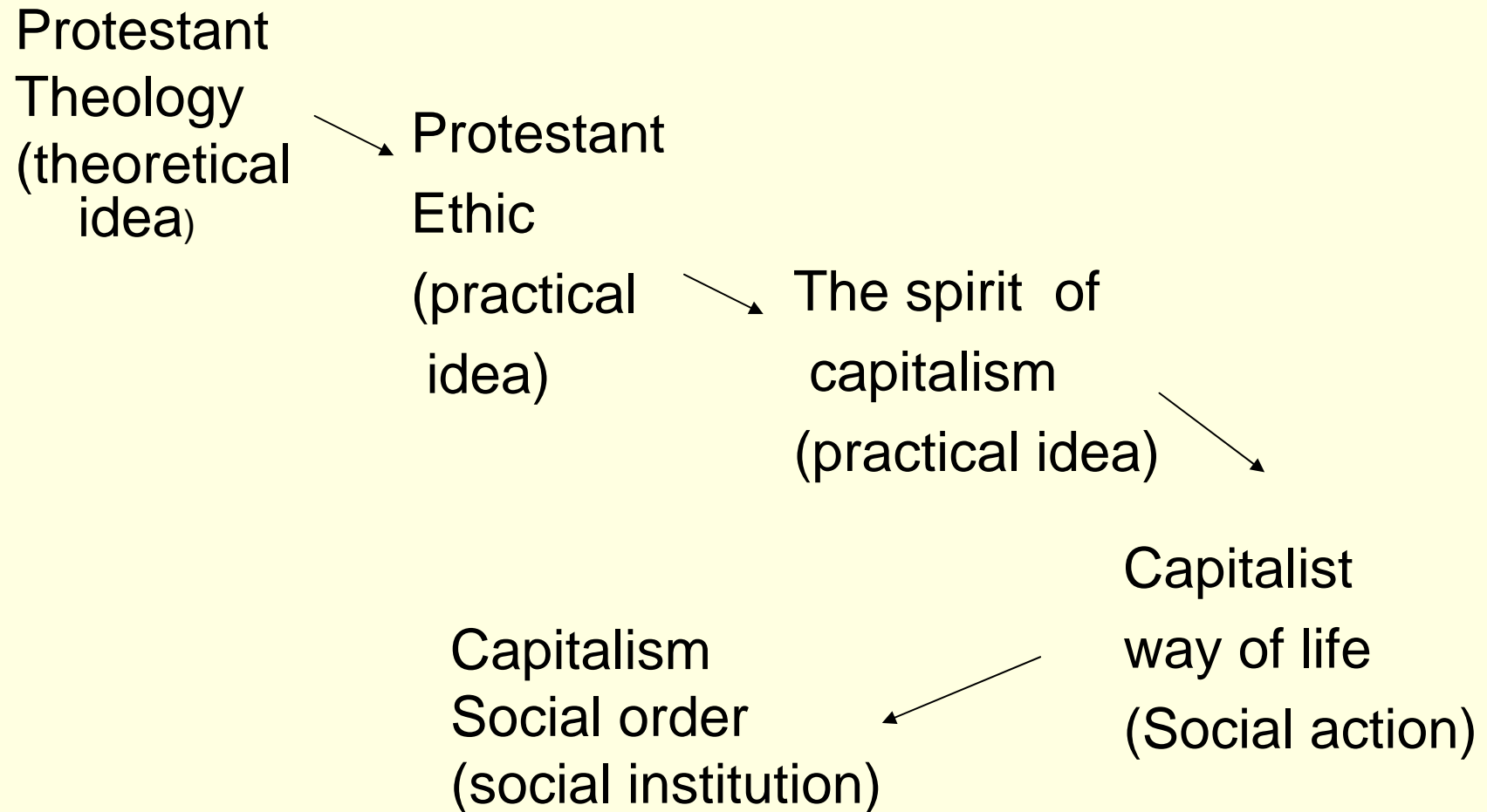
The religious foundation of the spirit of capitalism

- Money-making as the results and the expression of virtue and proficiency in work
- Work is a calling, with supreme religious meaning
- The formation of an inner-worldly asceticism

The relevance of Protestantism to Capitalism

- “the religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means to asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident **proof of rebirth and genuine faith**, must have been the **most powerful conceivable lever** for the expansion of that attitude toward life which we have here called the spirit of capitalism. When the limitation of consumption is combined with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save. ” (p.172)

Weber's strategy of explanation



Weber's strategy of explanation

Protestant
Theology
(theoretical
idea)

Protestant
Ethic

(practical
idea)

The spirit of
capitalism

(practical idea)

Capitalist
way of life
(Social action)

Capitalism
Social order
(social institution)



The impact of the capitalist way of life

- “Limitation to specialized work, with a renunciation of the Faustian universality of man which it involves, is a condition of any valuable work in the modern world; hence deeds and renunciation inevitably condition each other today. This fundamentally ascetic trait of middle-class life ... was what Goethe wanted to teach, at the height of his wisdom, in the Wanderjahren, and in the end which he gave to the life of his Faust . For him **the realization meant a renunciation, a departure from an age of full and beautiful humanity**, which can no more be repeated in the course of our cultural development than can the flower of the Athenian culture of antiquity.” (p.180-1)

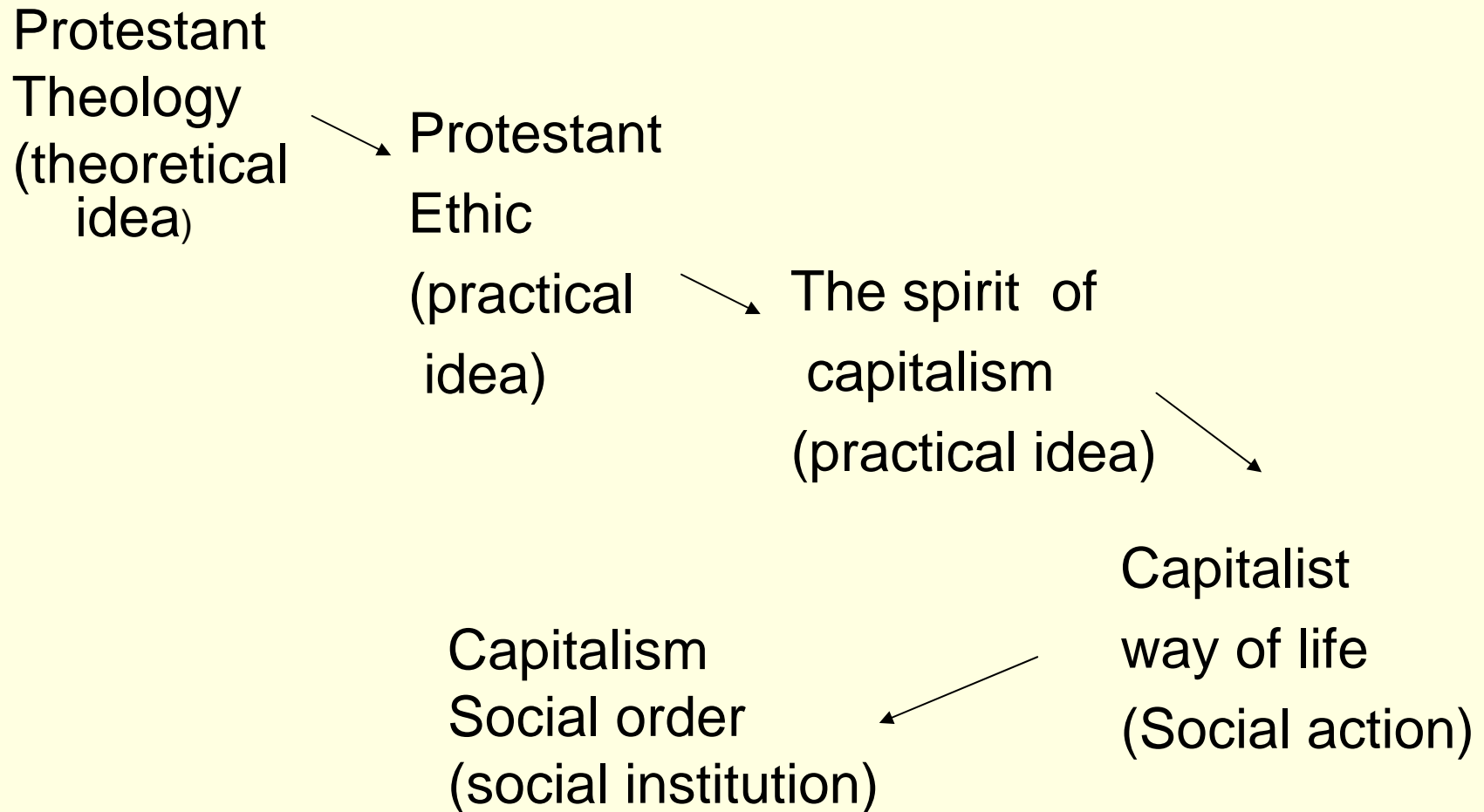
The erosion of Protestant Ethic by the Capitalist economic order

- “the full economic effect of those great religious movements ...came only after the peak of the purely religious enthusiasm was past. Then the intensity of the search for the Kingdom of God commenced gradually to pass over into sober economic virtue; **the religious roots died out slowly, giving way to utilitarian worldliness.**” (p.176)

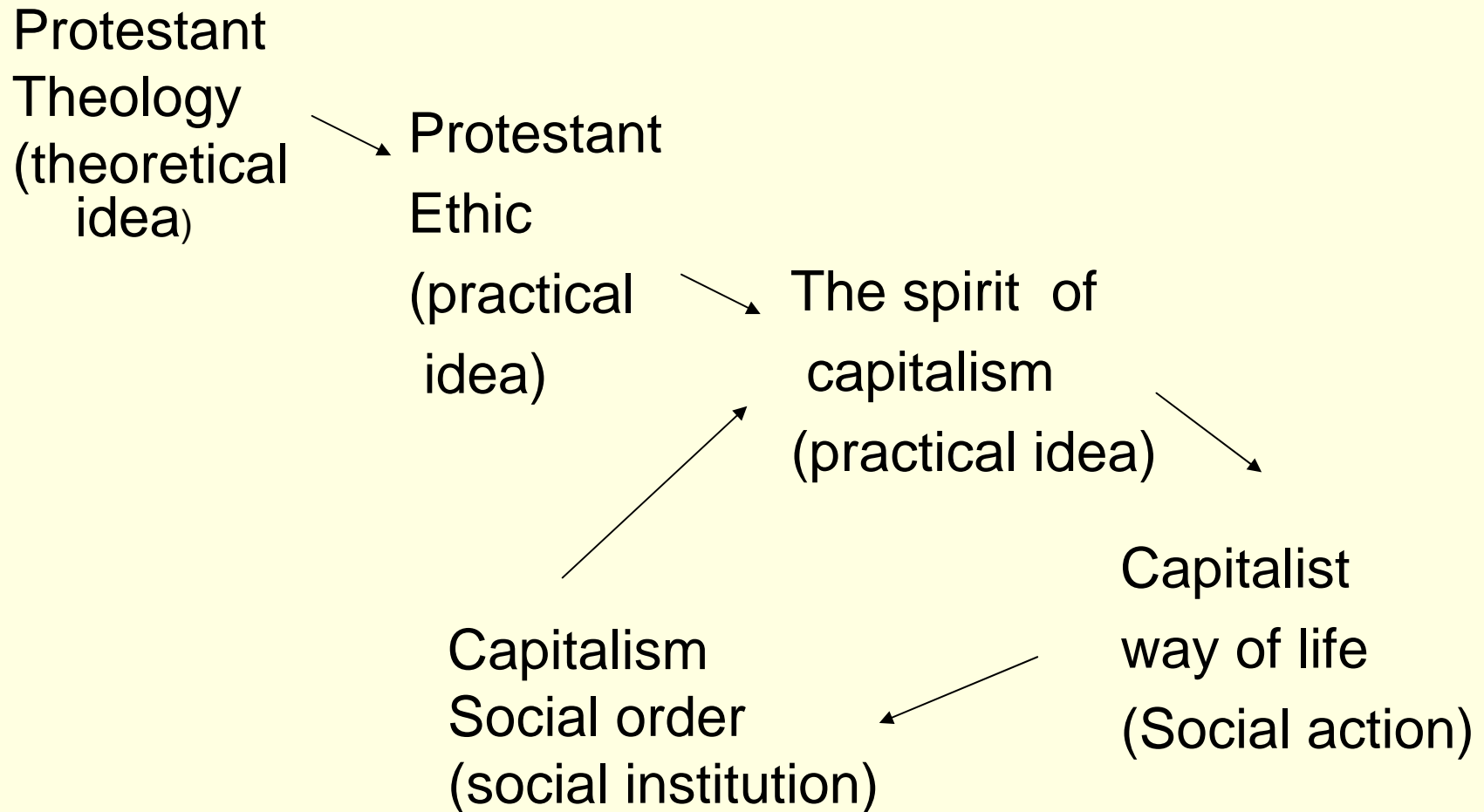
The breakdown of meaning foundation in modern life

- Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. ... [V]ictorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer. The rosy blush of its laughing heir, the Enlightenment, seems also to be irretrievably fading, and the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs. Where the fulfilment of the calling cannot directly be related to the highest spiritual and cultural values, or when, on the other hand, it need not be felt simply as economic compulsion, the individual generally abandons the attempt to justify it at all. (p.181-2)

Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism



The spirit of capitalism without Protestant ethic



The allegory of iron cage

- 'The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the "saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment". But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage.' (p.181)

The portrait of modern life

- No one knows who will live in this cage in the future.... For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said:
"Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved." (p.182)

Comparison

	Mean	Ends	Ultimate meaning
Puritan Entrepreneur	Ascetical life	Success in Secular work	Religious Salvation
Modern worker	Specialization	Qualified workers in the capitalist econ order	?

Contemporary Relevance

- Spirit of Capitalism: the working manners of modern worker
- Iron cage: the problem in the meaning of life of modern person