

THE PROTESTANT ETHIC THESIS IN
ANALYTICAL AND COMPARATIVE CONTEXT*

I

Weber's famous "Protestant Ethic" thesis—the thesis published originally by him as "Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus" in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft in Sozialpolitik*, in 1901-02 (Vol. XX) and reprinted in his *Gesammelte Aufsätze für Religionssoziologie*, in 1920¹—which has allegedly attributed the rise of modern, as distinct from pre-modern, types of capitalism² to the influence of Protestantism and especially of Calvinism, has provided—probably more than any other single *specific thesis* in the social sciences—a continuous focus of scientific controversy.

* This is part of an introduction to a collection of essays on Protestant Ethics to be published by Basic Books; a shortened version of this paper was given as a lecture before the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

¹ English translation as: *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by T. Parsons, foreword by T. H. Tawney, London, 1930.

² On Weber's distinction between pre-modern and modern capitalism see Max Weber, *General Economic History*, N. Y., Collier Book Edition, 1961, p. 4.

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This controversy has burst aflame anew in each decade, each generation of scholars seeing in it a continuous challenge. Although in each generation there were those, like Robertson in the twenties,³ Fanfani in the thirties,⁴ and Samuelson in the fifties,⁵ who denied it any validity, yet somehow even such denials had to be stressed anew, each generation having to grapple with the fact that so many still attributed to this thesis some central importance in the social sciences in general and in the understanding of modernity in particular.

In the last fifteen years or so, with the upsurge of the great interest in development and modernization beyond Europe, interest in this thesis has arisen once more. Many seek in the existence or non-existence of some equivalent to the Protestant ethic the key to the understanding of the successful or unsuccessful modernization of non-European countries.

In order to be able to understand what it is in this thesis that may be of such critical importance it will be worth while to survey very briefly some of the major stages of the controversy around it, even if it would of course be impossible to present here a complete history of this controversy.

We may very broadly distinguish between two types of controversial arguments with regard to the Weberian thesis, corresponding to some extent, but not entirely, to chronological stages in its development.

The first stage of this controversy, best summarized in Fischhoff's article and in Baerling's book,⁶ has mostly, although not entirely, dealt with the analysis of the alleged direct causal connection between the Protestant—Calvinist—ethic on the

³ J. W. Robertson, *Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism*, Cambridge, 1933.

⁴ A. Fanfani, *Cattolicesimo e protestantesimo nella formazione del capitalismo*, Milano, 1934; English translation: *Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism*, London, 1955.

⁵ Kurt Samuelson, *Religion and Economic Action*, transl. E. G. French, London, Heinemanns, 1961.

⁶ See E. Fischhoff, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," *Social Research*, vol. XI (1944), pp. 54-77; R. F. Baerling, *Protestantisme en Kapitalisme, Max Weber in die Critick*, Groningen-Batavia, J. B. Wolters, 1946; and see also R. H. Tawney, "Religion and Economic Life," *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1956. For a recent view which again takes up this type of argument see G. R. Elton, *Reformation Europe, 1517-1559*, London, 1963, p. 312 ff.

one hand and the development of capitalism on the other. At this stage the Weberian thesis was attacked at almost all the quotients of the assumed equation. Some have stressed that most of the initial Calvinist communities—be it Calvin's Geneva itself, the earlier Calvinist communities in the Netherlands, in Scotland or in the Palatinate—did not favor the development of new, more autonomous economic orientations or organizations, that in their manifest attitudes to economic activities they did not go much beyond the more severe medieval Catholic orientations, and that in some respects they were even more conservative and restrictive towards such activities, mainly because of their predilection for the extreme, totalistic religious regulation of all aspects of life which made them take all these matters more seriously than late-medieval Catholicism.

On the other end of the equation it was often stressed that the first great upsurges of capitalism developed in pre-Reformation Catholic Europe—be it in Italy, Belgium, or Germany—and that they were much more “developed” than those in the first Protestant or Calvinist countries. On the contrary, economic retrogression or retardation very often set in in many of these communities, as for instance in Calvin's Geneva, to no small degree due to the restrictive orientations of the Protestant communities mentioned above.

Others have cast doubt on the specific “mechanism” through which, according to Weber, Calvinist belief became transformed into or linked to motivation for this-worldly economic activities, namely the psychological derivatives of the idea of predestination, the great anxiety which this idea created among believers, urging them to undertake in a compulsive way this-worldly activities to prove their being of the elect.

While some tended to cast doubt on the very relevance of any aspect of Calvinist religious orientation for the development of modern frameworks and activities, others like Hudson and lately the Georges have tended to point to other orientations in the

¹ W. Hudson, “Puritanism and the Spirit of Capitalism,” *Church History*, XVIII (1949), pp. 3-16 and idem, “The Weber Thesis Reexamined,” *Church History*, XXX (1961), pp. 88-89; C. H. & K. George, *The Protestant Mind and the English Reformation, 1570-1640*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961. For a preliminary view see C. K. George, “Protestantism and Capitalism in Pre-Revolutionary England,” *Church History*, XXVII (1958), pp. 351-371.

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Calvinist *Weltanschauung*, such as the emphasis on individual responsibility, on the general orientation to “this world” (as against the “other-worldly” orientation of many other religions), as well as the general shattering of the traditional *Weltanschauung*, as possible ways or mechanisms through which the Protestant, Calvinist Puritan, or Denominational outlook could facilitate the development of modernity.³

Others who admitted the “predilection” of Protestantism for various aspects of the “modern” world—be it economic, scientific or modern political activities—tended to attribute this predilection to structural situations and exigencies within which Protestantism was put as a result of the wars of religion or the Counter-Reformation, to its being in a minority position in these countries, or to the indirect impact of Protestantism on the overall institutional structure of these countries in the direction of growing pluralism and tolerance. They often did stress that the tendency of many Protestant groups—Huguenots in France or in exile, Protestant sects in Holland and England—to participate more actively than their Catholic or even Lutheran neighbors in modern capitalistic activities developed, usually later, in the 17th-18th centuries, and that it was very often due to reasons which had but little to do with the original Calvinist belief but was mostly related to such factors as persecution, forced emigration and exile and denial of possibilities of participation in central politics and cultural spheres.

Still others tended to emphasize that the tendencies of Protestants to participate in these activities were later developments, not necessarily typical of the mainstream of Calvinism or Protestantism, but more characteristic of its transition into a more pluralistic, tolerant, semi-secularized world and of the decline of its strong religious commitments than of its own initial inherent religious tendencies. For these writers it was often the *weakening* of the original totalistic religious impulses of the Puritans that provides the basic link between Protestants and modernity.

³ In this vein see also the older works of H. Hauser, reprinted in “La modernité du XVI^e siècle,” *Cahiers des Annales*, No. 21, Paris, 1963. Several of the relevant studies can be found in R. W. Green, ed., *Protestantism and Capitalism*, Boston, 1959.

Tawney's classical study,⁹ which was intended as a sympathetic defense of Weber's thesis against many of the earlier critics like Robertson, was basically a detailed study of exactly such processes of the continuous change of the motivational orientations of Puritan groups in the direction of secularization, of growing emphasis on economic motives and activities within a society which became more and more "tolerant" and secular.

In almost all criticism of this type or at this stage we can thus find an ambivalent attitude to Weber's thesis. On the one hand we find a critique of the direct causal relationship between the rise of Protestantism and the development of economic activities which has allegedly been explained by Weber in the concrete European or American setting. But on the other hand, most of these critics, with the exception of the extreme negativists, do admit that despite all this there was indeed "something" in the Weberian thesis. In one way or another they acknowledge the existence of some "insight" or kernel of truth in Weber's thesis without, however, defining exactly what this kernel may indeed be, outside some of the very broad, general terms mentioned above.

II

In order to be able to understand more fully this "kernel" it is necessary to go to the second type of argument, or to the second phase of controversy. This type of argument can already be found in the earlier works of Troeltsch and Holl.¹⁰ Although these two scholars were in a way in seemingly opposing camps—Troeltsch supporting Weber's thesis and Holl at least partially denying it—yet they did to a large extent have something in common. Neither Troeltsch nor Holl was mainly concerned with the analysis of the mechanisms of the alleged direct causal relation between Protestantism and capitalism activity. Troeltsch fully

⁹ R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, London, 1926.

¹⁰ E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols., N. Y., 1931 (new edition 1956); E. Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress*, Boston, 1958; K. Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, Tübingen, 1927, esp. vols. 1, 2; K. Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*, N. Y., Meridian Books, 1959.

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acknowledged that the initial impetus of Calvinism was what would be nowadays called a totalistic one, i.e., an attempt to establish a new civilization totally regulated by religious precepts.

But for him the major problem was not whether these initial orientations did promote or even facilitate the various types of such modern activities but rather what their influence was once they did not succeed in establishing the first totalistic impulses.

Holl's major concern or polemic against both Weber and Troeltsch was mostly in defense of Lutheranism, which has often been depicted as the more conservative force in the Reformation, with but few transformative powers, as against the more dynamic and revolutionary Calvinism. Against this view Holl claimed that, from a broad comparative point of view (a view which in his work includes the analysis of the Eastern Church), Lutheranism did indeed contain a dynamic, transformative tendency of its own which, while differing from that of Calvinism, being more centered on the individual and less on the *religious community*, could yet, given appropriate conditions, contribute greatly to the formation of forms of modern life and culture.¹¹

But this type of approach to Weber's thesis has been largely neglected since then and only recently has it been taken up again, often without any reference to these earlier studies, in different ways by various scholars. Of these a brief discussion of the work of Trevor-Roper, Luethy and Walzer¹² can best serve for the purposes of our analysis.

¹¹ On these differentiations between Lutheranism and Calvinism, as seen also from the point of view of Weber's strong emphasis on Calvinism, see B. Nelson, "Max Weber's Sociology of Religion," *American Sociological Review*, XXX (1965), No. 4, pp. 595-601. See also A. Müller-Armack, *Religion und Wirtschaft*, Stuttgart, 1959. More recently a similar thesis with regard to Lutheranism has been taken up by G. Ritter in "Das 16. Jahrhundert als weltgeschichtliche Epoche," *Archiv für Geschichte der Reformation*, XXXV (1938) and *Die Neugestaltung Europas im 16. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1950, esp. ch. 3.

¹² H. R. Trevor-Roper, "Religion, the Reformation and Social Change," *Historical Studies*, IV (1965), London, Bowes & Bowes, pp. 18-45. H. Luethy, "Once Again: Calvinism and Capitalism," *Encounter*, XXII (1964), No. 1, pp. 26-38, published previously in *Preuves*, 161, July 1964 and reprinted in H. Luethy, *Le Passé, menace présente*, Ed. du Rocher, 1965, pp. 13-25, where parts of Luethy's work on the Protestant Bank (see note 13) most relevant from the point of view of a general discussion of the Protestant Ethic thesis have also been reprinted as "Puritanisme et Société Industrielle," pp. 58-71, and "Le Prêt à Intérêt et la Compétence de la Théologie en Matière Economique," pp. 71-99. See also the discussion on Luethy which took place in the subsequent

Luethy, and to some extent Trevor-Roper, denies the correctness of Weber's thesis in the economic field proper. They claim that economic development in Europe was independent of the specific direct impact of Protestantism. They show, for instance, as others did before them, that the first initial impact of Protestantism on economic life was, as Calvin's Geneva shows, a restrictive one.

But they admit, indeed they stress, that especially England, the Netherlands, and to some extent the Scandinavian countries were more successful, after the Counter-Reformation, in developing viable, continuous, flexible modern institutions, whether in the economic, political or scientific fields, than most of the Catholic countries like Spain, Italy or even France which were the first to develop many modern institutional frameworks.

At one level of argument it seems as if to them, as to some of their precursors, this was mostly due to the structural implications or exigencies of the victory of Protestantism and not necessarily to anything inherent in the religious orientation of Protestantism in general or of Calvinism and Puritanism in particular.

But at another level of argument the picture is already somewhat different. Thus, for instance, Luethy transposes Weber's theory almost entirely to the political field. For him the major impact of Protestantism on European history has been in the political field. This impact was effected, according to him, through the direct reference to the Bible as a source for new bases of legitimation of authority as well as through the new structural impetus to the development of pluralistic settings which developed through the outcome of the Counter-Reformation or the Wars of Religion.

In principle the type of criticism that Luethy directs against Weber could easily be directed against his own thesis. It could easily be shown that the original political impulse of either Lutheranism or Calvinism was not in a "liberal" or democratic direction but rather in a more "totalistic" one. But whatever the correctness of such criticism of details, it would be largely misdirected, because Luethy's analysis does not deal with the direct

issues of *Encounter and Preuves*. M. Walzer, "Puritanism as a Revolutionary Ideology," *History and Theory*, III (1964), pp. 59-90; M. Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard Univ. Press.

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economic or political impact or “results” of the activities of certain religious groups or beliefs but rather, as has already been the case by Troeltsch and Holl, with its transformative effects.

From this point of view Luethy’s more specific work on the Protestant Bank is very significant.¹³ Here he shows how the ultimate difference between “Catholic” finance and “Protestant Banks” was based on the degree to which the latter were not tied to the given political order but were conceived as an autonomous sphere of organized activity, supported by the legitimation of economic calculus. This legitimation could be derived from the Calvinist ethic, but it developed in Geneva mostly after the downfall of the initial totalistic-religious regime in Geneva, while in France the reliance of the monarchs on the (mostly foreign) Protestant banks also developed only after the expulsion of the Huguenots on the one hand and the bankruptcies of the Royal (“traditional Catholic”) finances, on the other hand.

Parallel indications have been developed even more fully by Walzer’s independent analysis of the two groups instrumental in the shaping of Puritanism in England, the intelligentsia (ministers, students and lay intellectuals) and the gentry. He shows that originally the impulses of Calvinism were directed not in the economic field, but in the political one and that in this field they were also initially mostly totalistic.¹⁴ But then he continues to show, in very detailed analysis, how, after the initial failure of these totalistic orientations, when the Puritans became a persecuted minority, and especially an *exiled* minority of “intellectuals,” there took place a transformation of their orientations in the direction of the reconstruction of new rules, organizations, new patterns of human connections and new society and polity.

¹³ H. Luethy, *La Banque Protestante en France*, 2 vols., Paris, SEVPEN, 1959-61, esp. vol. II, p. 786.

¹⁴ M. Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* cit. A similar emphasis on the political activities of some, especially French and Scottish Protestants, can be found in S.A. Burrell, “Calvinism, Capitalism, and the Middle Classes: Some Afterthoughts on an Old Pattern,” *Journal of Modern History*, XXXII (1960), pp. 129-141; and H. R. Trevor-Roper, “Scotland and the Puritan Revolution,” in H. Y. Bell & L. Ollard (eds.), *Historical Essays 1600-1750; presented to David Ogg*, London, 1963, pp. 78-130.

The transformative potentials, in the political field, of the Puritan idea of the covenant have been explored previously by many people. See among others, Hudson, *op. cit.*; J. G. Breuer, “Puritan Mysticism and the Development of Liberalism,” *Church History*, 1950.

III

Thus Luethy's work on the Bank and Walzer's analysis of the Puritan intelligentsia indeed contain very important indications for the full reexamination of the Weberian thesis in its broadest analytical and comparative applications.

The crux of this reexamination lies in shifting the course of the argument from an examination of the allegedly direct, casual relation between Protestantism and capitalism (or other aspects of the modern world) to that of the transformative capacities of Protestantism.

It is of course true that originally the Reformation was not a "modernizing" movement. It did not have very strong modernizing impulses; it did indeed aim at the establishment of a new, purer "medieval" socio-political religious order. Originally Protestantism was indeed a religious movement aiming at the religious restructuring of the world. It was just because of these strong "this-worldly" religious impulses that from the very beginning they were caught up with, and in, the major socio-political, economic and cultural trends of change which European (and especially Western and Central European) society was undergoing from the end of the 17th century on: the development of capitalism, the development of Renaissance states, absolutism and the consequent "general" crisis of the 17th century, the crisis between "state" and "society," the development of a secular outlook and science.¹⁵

The Reformation did not directly cause any of these developments, although in many indirect ways it did of course contribute to the weakening of the traditional framework of European society. Many of these crises or developments stemmed from the same broad roots as the Reformation—from the crisis of Catholic civilization in general and the Catholic Church in particular. But their specific cause, as well as the groups which fostered them, whether the humanistic like Erasmus, the new international merchants like the Fuggers, did on the whole differ from

¹⁵ H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," and Trevor-Roper's "General Crisis: A Symposium," in T. Aston (ed.), *Crisis in Europe*, London and New York, 1965, pp. 59-97 and 97-117 respectively (all these reprinted from *Past and Present*).

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the reformers, although sometimes overlapping and often very much serving as important mutual reference groups. But however strong the concrete inter-relationships between these various groups and the various "crises" which they fostered, neither was a *direct* cause of the other.

The significance of the Reformation and of Protestantism is to be found not in the fact that it directly caused or gave rise to new types of economic, political or scientific activities, but in its contribution to the restructuring of European society, a restructuring which developed as a result of all these crises but which came, in the post-Counter-Reformation period, to a fuller fruition in the Protestant than in the Catholic countries, because of some of the transformative potential of Protestantism as it developed in these settings. This crucial impact of Protestantism in the direction of modernity came after the failure of its initial totalistic socio-religious orientations.

Thus the special importance, from a broad comparative point of view, of Protestantism could be seen in that, for a variety of reasons to be shortly examined, it did contain within itself the seeds of such transformation, and that in its specific setting these seeds could bear fruit and greatly influence the course of European civilization on the way to modernity.

IV

Much additional research attests to this great *transformative* capacity of Protestantism in situations which from the very beginning do not permit much hope for a total religious transformation of society in the direction of its original religious impulses. Thus, for instance, the various studies on the genesis and influence of Protestant conversion in much later phases of development in Catholic countries, as in the cases of mystical or Protestant sects in Brazil or Italy, indicate a pattern of development not dissimilar from that of some of the Puritan groups in England.¹⁶

Even more significant than this relatively similar pattern of genesis are social and political and economic orientations and activ-

¹⁶ H. Cassin, "Quelques facteurs historiques et sociaux de la diffusion du protestantisme en Italie méridionale," *Archives de Sociologie des Religions*, II (1956), pp. 55-73.

ities within a setting within which Protestants were from the very beginning in a position of a minority, even if not a persecuted minority. The researches of Willems and others¹⁷ indicate most clearly that in such cases the Protestant groups have tended to develop orientations towards much more active participation in more differentiated, modern, economic, political and community relations.

Perhaps even more striking from the point of view of our analysis is the comparison between the pioneering-settlement activities of Catholic and Protestant settlers in the New World. Moog's perceptive, even if unpersistent, analysis shows how the difference between the "bandeirantes," "piratic" types of settlements in Brazil and the more economically expansive and democratic type of settlement in the U.S.A. can be largely attributed to the differences in the original orientations of the Catholic and Puritan settlers.¹⁸

v

This shift of the locus of the discussion and controversy about the Weberian thesis from the analysis of the direct-causal links between Protestantism and capitalism (or other types of modern institutions) to the analysis of the broader transformative powers or tendencies of Puritanism or Calvinism puts this discussion, to begin with, in a broader perspective of the totality of Weber's work. As Mommsen has recently put it very succinctly: "To Max Weber the exemplar among such religious movements that 'change the world' was Puritan. Although he investigated other variants of Christianity and other great world religions from the standpoint of the social consequences of their teaching, none in his opinion

¹⁷ E. Willems, "Protestantismus und Kulturwandel in Brasilien und Chile," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozial-psychologie*, XV (1963), Sonderheft 7, pp. 307-334.

¹⁸ C. V. Moog, *Bandeirantes and Pioneers*, N. Y., 1964. A more enthusiastic account of the Bandeirantes is given in Cassian Ricardo, *Marcha para Oeste*, Rio de Janeiro, 1942, 2 vols., which does not, however, greatly differ in the analytical description of the activities of the Bandeirantes. For a general collection on the Bandeirantes see R. M. Morse (ed.), *The Bandeirantes*, N. Y., Knopf, 1965.

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had influenced the course of human development in quite such a revolutionary manner as had Puritanical religiosity.”¹⁹

But beyond this it puts this discussion in a broader *general* comparative and analytical perspective.

Already in Weber’s general work on sociology of religion the major emphasis was not on the direct religious injunctions about different economic behavior but on the more general “Wirtschaftsethik” of each religion, i.e., on those broader types of orientations inherent in the ethos of each religion which influence and direct economic motivation and activities.

But the shift to the analysis of the transformative capacities of different religions contains an additional element, namely the possibility that, under certain conditions, different religions may foster new types of activities, activities which go beyond the original direct “Wirtschaftsethik,” i.e., there may take place a transformation of the original religious impulses which may in turn lead to the transformation of social reality.²⁰

This shift does necessitate a reformulation of the problems for comparative analysis in general, for the consequent reexamination of the Weberian thesis, even within the context of Weber’s overall work, in particular. In addition to asking about the “Wirtschaftsethik” orientation of different religions, or of the religious orientations of different social groups (a central aspect of Weber’s work which is fully analyzed by Andreski²¹), it is necessary to ask about the *transformative* capacity of different religions (or, for that matter, of secular ideologies), i.e., their capacity for internal transformation which may then facilitate the development of new social institutions and individual moti-

¹⁹ W. Mommsen, “Max Weber’s Political Sociology,” *International Social Science Journal*, XVII (1965), No. 1, p. 31.

²⁰ One of the interesting analyses which deals explicitly with such transformative capacities of religious movements after their initial failure is that of G. Sholem, “On the Sabbatean Movement in the 17th Century.” See G. Sholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, N. Y., 1946, 1956, and G. Sholem, *Shabbetai Tzvi* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1958, 2 vols.

²¹ S. Andreski, “Method and Substantive Theory in Max Weber,” *British Journal of Sociology*, XV (1964), No. 1, pp. 1-8. See also G. K. Yong’s, “Introduction to Max Weber,” *The Religion of China*, New York, 1964; and see also B. van der Sprenkel, “Max Weber on China,” *Theory and History*, III (1964), pp. 348-70.

vations in directions different from their original impulses and aims.

Here several problems stand out. The first problem is what it is within any given religion (or ideology) that creates or may account for the existence of such transformative capacities. The second question is in what directions such transformative capacities may develop. Last comes the question what are the conditions in the society within such religious or ideological groups develop which facilitate or impede the institutionalization of such transformative capacities or orientations.

With regard to all these questions only very tentative and preliminary answers can be given both with regard to Protestantism and even more with regard to other religions. But even such preliminary answers perhaps may indicate some of the possibilities of such an analytical and comparative approach.

VI

With regard to the first question, what it is in the nature of Protestantism that creates such transformative potential or capacity, to a large extent the answer has been given by many scholars, although it probably needs further elaboration and systematization.

All of them seem to agree that this potential or capacity does not seem to be connected to any single tenet of the Protestant faith, but rather in several aspects of its basic religious and value orientations.

The most important of these are its strong combination of "this-worldliness" and transcendentalism, a combination which orients individual behavior to activities within this world but at the same time does not ritually sanctify any of them, either through a mystic union or any ritual act, as the final point of religious consummation or worthiness. Second is the strong emphasis on individual activism and responsibility. Third is the unmediated, direct relation of the individual to the sacred and to the sacred tradition, an attitude which, while strongly emphasizing the importance and direct relevance of the sacred and of tradition, yet minimizes the extent to which this relation and individual commitment can be mediated by any institution, orga-

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nization or textual exegesis.²² Hence it opens up the possibility of the continuous re-definition and re-formulation of the nature and scope of this tradition, a possibility which is further enhanced by the strong transcendental attitude which minimizes the sacredness of any "here and now."

These religious orientations of Protestantism and Protestants (and especially Calvinists) were not, however, confined only to the realm of the sacred. They were closely related to and evident in two major orientations in most Protestant groups' conception of the social reality and of their own place in it, i.e., in what may be called their status images and orientations.²³

Most of the Protestant groups developed a combination of two types of such orientations. First was their "openness" towards the wider social structure, rooted in their "this-worldly" orientation which was not limited only to the economic sphere but which also, as we shall see later, could encompass other social fields. Second, they were characterized by a certain autonomy and self-sufficiency from the point of view of their status orientation. They evinced but little dependence from the point of view of the crystallization of their own status symbols and identity on the existing political and religious centers.

VII

With regard to the second question, namely that of the directions in which such transformative capacities can be effective, the picture is already much more complicated, certainly much more so than as presented by Weber himself.

The first such level of institutional aspect, probably least dealt with by Weber, which Protestantism tended to transform was that of the central political symbols, identities and institutions.

²² This point has been analyzed with great skill, with regard to the Armenians in the Netherlands and their potentially more revolutionary and open orientations, by L. Kolakowski, "La genèse et la structure dans l'étude des idéologies religieuses," in M. de Gandillac, L. Goldmann, J. Piaget (eds.), *Entretiens sur les notions de genèse et de structure*, Paris - The Hague, Mouton, 1965, pp. 307-323.

²³ G. Pauck, *The Heritage of the Reformation*, N. Y., 1961, and also H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, N. Y., Meridian Books, 1959.

By the very nature of the totalistic reformatory impulses of the Protestants these institutions constituted natural foci of their orientations and activities. The very basic theological tenets, whether of Luther, Zwingli or Calvin, or whatever the marked differences between them in their attitudes to political institutions, contained some very strong ingredients for the reformulation of the relation between state and "society," between rules and ruled, and a redefinition of the scope and nature of the political community.

The initial failure of their totalistic attempts did not abate or nullify these impulses. On the contrary, the structural roots of the various crises of European society in the 16th and 17th centuries, and especially the crisis of "state vs. society," as well as the political exigencies of Protestant communities in various European states, facilitated and even reinforced this continuous orientation towards the political sphere and towards activities within it.

And indeed the Protestant Reformation did have a great initial impact on the central political sphere. Certainly this impact was not necessarily intended by the rulers who adopted Protestantism. Yet it did have important structural effects which greatly facilitated the further development of a more flexible and dynamic social system.

Of crucial importance here was the search of the rulers for new legitimation as well as their attempts to forge new symbols of collective identity.

On both these levels, that of legitimation of new patterns of authority and of forging new symbols of national identity, there developed, through the initial religious impact of the major Protestant groups and especially through their transformation, the possibilities of the reformation of the relations between rulers and ruled, of patterns of political participation and of the scope and nature of the political community.²⁴

These orientations also contained possibilities for the restructurization of the central legal-institutional institutions and of their basic premises, centered around the idea of covenant and contract and around the reformulation of many concepts of natural law

²⁴ One of the earlier expositions of this view can be found in A. D. Lindsay, *The Modern Democratic State*, Oxford, 1945.

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which led to a much more differentiated view of the legal state and autonomy of voluntary and business corporations, freeing them from the more restricted view inherent in traditional natural law.²⁵ And indeed, in the first Protestant societies—England, Scandinavia, The Netherlands—and later in the United States, through the incorporation of Protestant orientations and symbols, perhaps even before the full development of motivations to new types of economic or scientific activities, there developed a transformation of the central symbolic and political sphere and of the basic interrelations between the political and social spheres. This not only reinforced the existing relative autonomy of these spheres but created new, more flexible types of political symbols, new bases of political obligations and more flexible political institutions.

Here the comparison with Catholic countries, especially during and after the Counter-Reformation, is extremely instructive. The ingredients of almost all the element—new bases of legitimation and new national symbols, autonomy of religious institutions (as evident, for instance, in the Gallican Church)—existed in most of these countries on the eve of the Reformation and even to some extent throughout the Counter-Reformation. And yet in these countries, such as Spain and France or even earlier in the Italian states of the Renaissance where the very first types of modern statecraft developed, these potentially diversifying orientations were stifled in their development not only by various external exigencies (like the vicissitudes of warfare among the small Italian principalities and the deflection of trade routes from them) but also by the maintenance of the older, Catholic symbols of legitimation, of the traditional relations between Church and State, and by viewing both of them as the natural or preordained mediators between man and community on the one hand and the sacred and natural orders on the other.²⁶

²⁵ D. Little, "The Logic of Order—An Examination of the Sources of Puritan-Anglican Controversy and of Their Relation to Prevailing Legal Conceptions in the 16th and 17th Centuries," unpublished Doctor of Theology Thesis, Harvard, 1963.

²⁶ See for instance A. Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, Princeton, N. J., Princeton Univ. Press, 1954; and also, for a Catholic analysis, very interesting from this point of view, N. Daniel-Rops, *The Protestant Reformation*, N. Y., 1961; idem, *The Catholic Reformation*, N. Y. 1961.

VIII

But the transformative effects of Protestantism were not limited only to the central institutions and symbols of society but also to other aspects of the institutional structure of modern societies, and especially to the development of new types of roles, role structure and role-sets and to motivations to undertake and perform such roles. The essential core of Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis, as distinct from Weber's wider discussion of the transformative effects of Protestantism, focuses on one aspect of this problem—the development of the role of the economic entrepreneur and of the specific setting within which this role could become institutionalized.

Here again it is obvious that many of the basic ingredients of this role and of its new specific goals have of course existed before, and have even continued to develop, to some extent, in Catholic countries. But it is true that in the period after the Counter-Reformation these developments, even when quantitatively initially *not different* from the later developments in the Protestant countries, could not free themselves, as Luethy's work on the Bank shows, from their dependence on the political center, in terms both of their goal-orientation and legitimation. In the Catholic countries these frameworks could not attain such autonomy and could not foster the consequent continuous impetus for further, more differentiated development. It was mostly in Protestant countries, or among Protestant (Calvinist) communities that these roles acquired a new type of autonomous legitimation and were able to develop a relatively independent organizational framework.

It was also mostly among the Protestant communities that another crucial aspect of the crystallization of new roles took place, namely the relatively intense development of motivation for the undertaking of such roles and goals and for identifying with them.

Thus we see that the transformative potential of Protestantism could effect the development of new roles in three different directions: first, in the definition of specific new roles with new types of goals, defined in autonomous terms and not tied to existing frameworks; second, in the development of broader institutional, organizational and legal normative settings which could both legitimize such new roles and provide them with the neces-

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sary resources and frameworks to facilitate their continuous working; and last, in the development of new types of motivation,²⁷ of motivations for the understanding of such roles and for identifying with them.

Although these three aspects of the development of new roles and role complexes are very closely interwoven and interrelated (and were perhaps not fully distinguished by Weber), yet they have to be kept distinct, because to some degree at least they can develop to different degrees.

But whatever the exact aspects of such new roles, which tended to develop under the impact of the transformative tendencies of Protestantism, as has already been briefly mentioned above, they did not develop only in the economic sphere but in a much greater variety of institutional spheres. They could indeed develop in the political sphere proper, giving rise to new types of active political participation and organizations in the form of parties, community organizations and public service (Scotland, The Netherlands, France).²⁸ They could also develop in the cultural and especially scientific and educational sphere.²⁹ In the economic sphere proper they could develop in other ways distinct from capitalist-mercantile or industrial entrepreneurship proper, as for instance, in the transformation of the economic activities of the gentry.³⁰

Here again in all these spheres the beginning and possibilities of such new roles existed before Protestantism, but it was more in the Protestant countries as against the Catholic ones that they

²⁷ On the importance of the relations between the motivational and the organizational aspects of the development of roles see R. N. Bellah, "Reflections on the Protestant Ethic Analogy in Asia," *The Journal of Social Issues*, XIX (1963), pp. 52-60.

²⁸ See S. Burrell, *op. cit.*

²⁹ The influence of Protestantism on science has constituted another continuous focus of research and controversy derived from the Protestant Ethic thesis. See for instance, B. K. Merton, "Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England," *Osiris*, IV (1938). L. S. Teuer, *The Scientific Intellectual*, New York, 1963. H. van Gelder, *The Two Reformations in the Sixteenth Century*, The Hague, 1961. K. Rabb, "Puritanism and the Rise of Experimental Science in England," *Journal of World History*, XVII (1962). H. F. Kearney, "Puritanism, Capitalism and the Scientific Revolution," *Past and Present*, XXVIII (1964), pp. 81-101, and the other articles in this issue.

³⁰ L. Stone's review of C. Hill's *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* in *The New York Review of Books*, August 26, 1965, p. 10.

developed in terms of organizational autonomy of goals, organizational structure and legitimation.

IX

We may now pass very briefly to the third question, namely that of the conditions under which such transformative capacities of Protestantism (or of other religions) could indeed become “absorbed” or institutionalized.

In very broad terms it seems that the possibility of such institutionalization is greater the stronger the seeds of the autonomy of the social, cultural and political orders are within any society. The existence of the autonomy of the cultural order facilitates the development of new symbolic realms which can support and legitimize central institution building while the autonomy of the sphere of social organization facilitates the development of new organizational nuclei which help in the crystallization of some viable new institutions without disrupting the whole fabric of the pre-existing order, thus enabling the new order to build to some extent on some at least of the earlier forces.

It is indeed in the realm of European and especially Western European Christian culture that we find the strongest tradition of autonomy of the major institutions of the cultural, political and social orders, and it is here indeed that the first and most continuous impetus to modernization did develop. But the course of modernization was not of course either even or continuous or the same in all, even Western and Central European, countries.

The specific transformative potentials of Protestantism can be seen in the fact that it took up these seeds of autonomy and pluralism and helped in recrystallizing them on a higher level of differentiation than in the Catholic countries, like Spain and France, where the potentially pluralistic impact of various modern trends, including Protestantism, was inhibited by the formation of the Catholic state during the Counter-Reformation.

But even within the Protestant countries there existed great variations. The transformative orientation of Protestantism did not necessarily develop fully and in the same direction among all Protestant groups in all countries, though to some minimal extent they probably occurred in most of them. The concrete development

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and institutionalization of such orientations depended to no small degree on the interaction between the orientations and placement of the major Protestant groups on the one hand and the pre-existing social structure, and especially on the extent of "openness" of the existing political and cultural centers, of the broader groups and strata and on their initial reaction to religious innovations. The exact scope of such institutionalization differed greatly according both to the nature of the groups (i.e., aristocracy, urban patriciate, various "middle" groups, urban proletariat or peasantry) which were the bearers of Protestantism on the one hand and their placement within the broader social structure in general and with regard to the political and cultural center in particular, on the other.

The transformative capacities of the Protestant groups were smallest in those cases where they attained full powers—when their more totalistic restrictive orientations could become dominant—or in situations where they were downtrodden minorities.³¹

Contrariwise, both the scope of new institutional activities which different transformed Protestant groups developed, and the extent to which they were successful in transforming central spheres of the society were most far-reaching in those situations in which the various Protestant groups were in a position of what may be very broadly called "secondary" élites, close to but not identified with, the central élites, and in so far as Protestant groups and orientation became integrated into wider national communities which developed on the basis of the prior autonomy of the Estates becoming the only bearers of such new political or national identity.³²

³¹ On their situations as minorities, see among others W. C. Scoville, "The Huguenots and the Diffusion of Technology," *Journal of Political Economy*, IX (1950), pp. 294-311; and E. Wayne-Nafziger, "The Mennonite Ethic in the Weberian Framework," *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History*, second series, II (1965), No. 3.

³² Of special interest in this respect are the developments in the Netherlands, the relation between Protestants and the development of the Dutch nation. See P. Geyl, *The Netherlands in the 17th Century*, London, 1961/5; P. Geyl, *Noord en Zuid*, Utrecht-Antwerpen, 1960, esp. pp. 150-173; I. Schöffer, "De Nederlandse revolutie," in *Zeven Revolution*, Amsterdam, J. H. de Bussy, 1964, pp. 9-29; I. Schöffer, "Protestantism in Flux during the Revolt of the Netherlands," in J. S. Bromley & E. H. Kossman (eds.), *Britain and the Netherlands*, Groningen,

The various interactions between different transformative potentialities and existing structural flexibility could give rise to paradoxically similar, or divergent, results. The influence of Lutheranism, allegedly more conservative than Calvinism, took a variety of forms for example. In the German principalities Lutheranism was indeed very restrictive, because the existing political framework was not an appropriate setting for the development of a new national identity and community or for the development of more autonomous and flexible status orientations in the broader strata.³³ Here, the “traditional” or autocratic rulers of the small principalities adopted the new religious orientations, and in this context the more conservative among these orientations became predominant, often restricting further institutional development.

But in the Scandinavian countries these religious orientations were integrated into new, wider national communities and developed on the bases of the prior autonomy of the Estates. While they certainly did not impede the development of an absolutist state in Sweden, they did help to make possible the subsequent development of these states in a more pluralistic direction.³⁴

Similarly paradoxical results, also demonstrating the importance of restrictive prior situations or frameworks, are evident in the institutionalization of Calvinism. Of special importance here is the Prussian case, where the institutionalization of these orientations by the absolutist, autocratic Hohenzollerns did not facilitate the development of a flexible and pluralistic political framework,

II (1964), pp. 67-84; and D. J. Roorda, “The Ruling Classes in Holland in the Seventeenth Century,” *ibid.*, pp. 109-133.

³³ See for instance Alfred L. Drummond, *German Protestantism since Luther*, London, Epworth Press, 1951; John T. MacNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1954; Gerhard Ritter, “Das 16. Jahrhundert als weltgeschichtliche Epoche,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Reformation*, XXXV (1938); and *Die Neugestaltung Europas im 16. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, Druckhaus Tempelhof, 1950, ch. 3, esp. pp. 133-170; Alfred Adam, “Die nationale Kirche bei Luther,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Reformation*, XXXV (1938), pp. 30-62.

³⁴ Hajalmar Holmquist, “Kirche und Staat im evangelischen Schweden,” *Festgabe für Karl Müller*, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1922, pp. 209-2077; Heinz H. Schrey, “Geistliches und weltliches Regiment in der schwedischen Reformation,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Reformation*, XLII (1951), pp. 146-159; Georg Schweiger, *Die Reformation in den Nordischen Ländern*, Munich, Kozel Verlag, 1962; and G. Ritter, *Die Neugestaltung* cit.

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though it did support development of more activist collective political goals.³⁵

Such juxtaposition of the transformative capacities of the Protestant groups and of the different specific institutional settings accounts for the very great variety of concrete patterns of institutionalization of new types of symbols and activities among the Protestant countries and communities. Only a full comparative analysis of the development of European society in the 16th-17th centuries from these points of view, which is obviously beyond the scope of the present chapter, could, however, do full justice to all this variety and enable us to test more systematically the various configurations presented above.

³⁵ Christine R. Kayser, "Calvinism and German Political Life," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Radcliffe, 1961.