

Revised: 29 December 2011

ECO 301Y1

The Economic History of Later-Medieval and Early-Modern Europe, 1300 - 1750

**Topic No. 8 [15]: The Protestant Reformations and 'The Rise of Capitalism':
The Weber-Tawney Theses and Their Critics**

READINGS: Despite the evident 'antiquity' of the Weber thesis, the debate about the relationship between religion and economic affairs, and especially between Protestantism and Capitalism, still continues to be a spirited one (so to speak).

- * 1. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York, 1930; 2nd edition: London: Allen & Unwin, 1976). Forward by Tawney and Preface by Weber (pp. 1-31); and especially chapter V: 'Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism', pp. 155-83.
- * 2. R. H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism : A Historical Study (London: 1926; reissued New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1937): the Preface, and Chapter IV: 'The Puritan Movement', pp. 164-226; and Chapter V: Conclusion, pp. 227-35.
- * 3. Christopher Hill, 'Protestantism and the Rise of Capitalism', in F. J. Fisher, ed., Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England (London: 1961), pp. 15-39.
- * 4. Christopher Hill, 'Puritanism, Capitalism, and the Scientific Revolution: A Debate', Past and Present, no. 29 (1964), pp. 88-97.
- * 5. Alastair Hamilton, 'Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*', and Stanley Engerman, 'Max Weber as Economist and Economic Historian', in Stephen P. Turner, ed., Cambridge Companion to Weber (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 151-71, 256-71. A condensed version of the latter appears as an EH.Net PROJECT Review, 21 March 2001, which is appended to the long-format bibliography: <http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/2PROTCAP2.pdf>
- * 6. Malcolm MacKinnon, 'The Longevity of the Thesis: A Critique of the Critics', in Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth, eds., Weber's Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts, (Cambridge and New York, 1993), pp. 211-43. A collection of modern essays on this debate.
- * 7. J. H. Van Stuivenberg, 'The Weber Thesis: Attempt at Reinterpretation', Acta Historiae Neerlandica, 8 (1975), 50-66.
- 8. E.L. Jones, 'Capitalism: One Origin or Two?', Journal of Early Modern History: Contacts, Comparisons, Contrasts, 1:1 (February 1997), 71-6.
- 9. Ephraim Fischhoff, 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The History of a Controversy', Social Research, 11 (1944), 61-77.
- *10. William H. Swatos and Lutz Kaelber, eds., The Protestant Ethic Turns 100: Essays on the Centenary of the Weber Thesis (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005): collected essays
- * 11. Lutz Kaelber, 'Max Weber and Usury: Implications for Historical Research', in Lawrin Armstrong, Ivana Elbl, and Martin M. Elbl, eds., Money, Markets and Trade in Late Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of John H. A. Munro, Later Medieval Europe Series, vol. 1 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 59-86.
- * 12. John Munro, 'The Weber Thesis Revisited -- and Revindicated?' Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire, 51 (1973), 381-91.
- *13. John Munro, 'Tawney's Century, 1540 - 1640: The Roots of Modern Capitalist Entrepreneurship',

in David S. Landes, Joel Mokyr, and William J. Baumol, eds, The Invention of Enterprise: Entrepreneurship from Ancient Mesopotamia to Modern Times, Kauffman Foundation Series on Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Princeton and Oxford:, 2010), pp. 107-55.

- * 14. John Munro, 'Usury, Calvinism and Credit in Protestant England: from the Sixteenth Century to the Industrial Revolution', in Francesco Ammannati, ed., Religione e istituzioni religiose nell'economia europea, 1000 - 1800/ Religion and Religious Institutions in the European Economy, 1000 - 1800, Fondazione Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica 'F. Datini', Prato, Serie II: Atti delle 'Settimane de Studi' e altri Convegni no. 43 (Florence, 2012), pp. 249-78.
- 15. Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches (1931), II: chapter iv, pp. 807-19; also, chapter iii, pp. 579 - 650.
- 16. David Landes, The Unbound Prometheus (1969; 2nd edn. 2003), chapter 1, pp. 1-40, especially pp. 21-33.
- 17. Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke, and Gillian Lewis, eds., Calvinism in Europe, 1540 - 1620 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 18. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, ed., The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560 - 1700 (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1996).

See the Department of Economics web page listing my publications: at this URL

<http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/index.php/index/research/publications?personId=51>

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QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways, if at all, did the traditional Church (Catholic) act as a barrier or hindrance to the development of 'capitalism' in late-medieval and early-modern Europe? In particular, were parish priests, monks, and other preachers generally hostile to trade, commerce, finance, industry? What were Church doctrines on usury (interest), profits, the just price, and on economic morality in general?
2. What effect, therefore, did the Protestant Reformations have upon public perception of these economic issues, and have in breaking down these barriers? What impact in general did the Reformation have upon public concepts of religious and moral authority? What views did the major Protestant sects hold on these issues? How and why did such views on economic issues change by the 17th or early 18th century?
3. Discuss the Weber-Tawney thesis on the social-psychological impact of Calvinist doctrines (predestination, the 'calling', 'worldly asceticism') in developing a modern ethos or 'spirit of capitalism.' In their view, what role did profit-making and profit reinvestment play in this ethos? Discuss their view of the 'Protestant work ethic' in the 17th and early 18th centuries.
4. Who were the 'Dissenters' of 18th- and early 19th-century England; and what disproportionate and positive role did they play in the Industrial Revolution?
5. For this last and important question, see my lecture notes for Eco. 303Y, on 'Science, Technology, Education, Religion, and Social Attitudes': <http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/03indrev.pdf>
The ECO 303Y lecture notes for 2008-2009 remain on line, on my web page.