

Weber wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* between 1902 and 1903, and it was subsequently published as two separate essays in 1904 and 1905. Weber had started writing *The Protestant Ethic* after

111 Ibid., pp. 936–7.

112 Ibid., p. 938.

113 Ibid., p. 287.

244 *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: formations of modern social thought*

completing a study of methodological issues in the social sciences. At the time, he was returning to academic work after an absence of almost four years. While formally part of Weber's overall study of religion, *The Protestant Ethic* stands alone as an independent work and it represents two distinct themes in Weber's theoretical writing as a whole. First is the theme of religion and religious ideas; and second is the theme of capitalism and capitalist development. In conjunction with Marx's *Capital*, *The Protestant Ethic* constitutes one of the two great theories of capitalism. Both works focus on the historical and causal forces shaping capitalist society.¹¹⁴ Where Weber differs from Marx, however, is in his interpretation of capitalism and the stress he placed on the interrelationship between the economic and religious spheres of society.

Aims of Weber's Study

Weber had two central aims in writing *The Protestant Ethic*. First, he wanted to show how beliefs influence action by establishing a connection between patterns of belief and the system of social action.¹¹⁵ In this respect, he wanted to know whether our beliefs are likely to affect our actions. Second, Weber wanted to show that there was a connection between religion and commercial activity, and that capitalism was largely shaped by religious forces. This claim by Weber, that religion and commerce are connected was controversial for several reasons. First, no one had looked at the relationship between economy and religion, since many believed that there was no underlying connection between the two. Second, economic reasoning had put forward the view that commercial activity, particularly capitalism, was based on logic and therefore not governed by faith or by belief. Third, the focus of commercial life was seen to be nothing more than the direct manipulation of the material world for purposes of profit and exchange. Fourth, the world of exchange stood in sharp contrast to the world of religious faith and belief. Weber's point of departure from these views, however, was in his reformulation of economic activity.

Weber's Central Thesis

Weber began by making two fundamental observations. First, he noticed that many of the commercial centers throughout Europe, including France, Germany, England, Scotland and Switzerland etc., had demonstrated intense commercial activity at the same time that Protestantism

was taking hold in Western Europe.¹¹⁶ Second, Weber noted that Western capitalism is motivated by two kinds of contradictory activities: on the one hand, a devotion to amassing wealth beyond the personal needs of the individual and, on the other, the avoidance of the use of wealth for purposes of personal pleasure or enjoyment. When we look at capitalism, asserted Weber, we see not only production and exchange, money making and profit, but an ascetic attitude toward life. These two characteristics – the devotion to amassing wealth and an ascetic attitude toward pleasurable activity – led Weber to argue that if asceticism had found its way into commercial activity then a religious ethic must underlie capitalism.

In order completely to understand Weber's argument, we have to look briefly at the concept of asceticism. In its most explicit sense, asceticism refers to rigorous self-denial. Historically the term originates from religious piety expressed through self-denial and renunciation of worldly pleasure. As a religious doctrine, asceticism holds that one can achieve a higher state by self-discipline and self-denial. Asceticism, then, may be defined as a conscious denial of worldly pleasure with the aim of reaching a valued goal and a higher moral state. Weber used the concept of asceticism to pinpoint a way of living in the world in which the individual engages in self-denial for purposes of obtaining future rewards. Weber believed that in modern capitalism self-denial has become a category of social action, since only in societies where capitalism flourishes is self-denial linked to achievement.

The 'Spirit' of Capitalism

To provide evidence of this pattern, Weber turned his attention to identifying what he called the 'spirit' of capitalism. He began by noting that, when compared to other systems of money making, Western capitalism is alone in developing a central philosophy or spirit. Weber reasoned that the spirit of capitalism can be identified by three overriding imperatives or demands: first, the devotion to amassing wealth and profit beyond the personal needs of the individual; second, the commitment to unrelieved toil and work coupled with self-denial; and third, the avoidance of the use of wealth for purposes of personal enjoyment. It is this 'spirit', according to Weber, that forms the special nature of Western capitalism.¹¹⁷

To show how the 'spirit' manifests itself in economic activity, Weber turned his attention to the works of Benjamin Franklin whom, he believed,

¹¹⁶ Weber stated: 'A glance at the occupational statistics of any country of mixed religious composition brings to light with remarkable frequency a situation which has several times provoked discussion in the Catholic press, namely, the fact that business leaders and owners of capital and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant.' *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 35.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–8. As far as Weber is concerned, there were many capitalisms: adventurous capitalism, speculative capitalism, usurious capitalism and modern industrial capitalism (ascetic capitalism). By drawing our attention to the 'spirit,' Weber was saying that the forces shaping ascetic capitalism in the West are unique.

represents the characteristics of the 'spirit' in its 'classical purity.' Franklin was a successful entrepreneur who wrote a self-help guide in 1736 called *Necessary Hints to those that would be Rich* and in 1748 followed it with another work called *Advice to a Young Tradesman*. Franklin put forward a set of maxims about how to be successful. Let us look at some of Franklin's views:

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 the day, though he spends but sixpence during his idleness, ought not to reckon that the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides.

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 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 murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds.

Remember this saying, the good paymaster is lord of another man's purse. He that is known to pay punctually and exactly to the time he promises, may at any time, on any occasion, raise all the money his friends can spare. This is sometimes of great use. After industry and frugality, nothing contributes more to the raising of a young man in the world than punctuality and justice in his dealings; therefore never keep borrowed money an hour beyond the time you promised.

The most trifling actions that affect a man's credit are to be regarded. The sound of your hammer at five in the morning, or eight at night, heard by a creditor, makes him easy six months longer; but if he sees you at a billiard-table, or hears your voice at a tavern, when you should be at work, he sends for his money the next day. It shows, besides, that you are mindful of what you owe; it makes you appear a careful as well as an honest man, and that still increases your credit.¹¹⁸

What struck Weber about Franklin's language was not its practical outlook towards making money, nor its insistence that honest individuals pay their creditors promptly, but rather that the demand to promptness, prudence, honesty, and saving appear within the context of a proclaimed duty to earn more and more capital. 'Truly, what is preached here,' wrote Weber, 'is not simply a means of making one's way in the world' on a practical basis, but rather 'a peculiar ethic.' He went on to state that the 'infraction of these rules is treated not as foolishness but as forgetfulness of duty.'¹¹⁹ In Weber's view, Franklin's words go beyond the mere suggestion of prudent business advice. Rather, they refer to a specific ethos or 'spirit,' and they 'take on the character of ethically colored maxims for shaping the conduct of life.'¹²⁰ Weber went on to point out that while Franklin's recommendations (be punctual, save money, be frugal, work hard, etc.) appear to have practical outcomes, they contain what Weber

118 Ibid., pp. 49–50.

119 Ibid., p. 51.

120 Ibid., p. 52.

referred to as a 'surplus of virtue.'¹²¹ In fact, Weber stated that Franklin himself believed that the recommendations had virtues which were divine in origin and 'which were intended to lead the individual to the path of righteousness.' This shows, stated Weber, that 'something more than mere utility is involved.'¹²²

Weber maintained that the central spirit of capitalism had the effect of putting forward the expectation of the performance of work as a moral duty, and in doing so it made the non-performance of work an 'infraction' of such duty.¹²³ This elevation of work to a moral duty was historically new and had not been seen in other traditional forms of capitalism. The 'spirit' of capitalism, therefore, may be defined as the introduction of a 'religious' ethic into everyday activity – one that had not been seen in previous systems of money making.

Distinctiveness of the 'Spirit' in Modern Capitalism: Traditional vs Modern Capitalism

Thus far, Weber has shown that the 'spirit' of capitalism is unique in two related respects: first, it developed only in modern Western capitalism and is lacking in other societies where capitalism has existed. Second, it indicated that the appearance of ethical demands in economic activity implied the presence of religious doctrine. In order to support the claim that the 'spirit' develops only in modern capitalism, Weber drew a comparison between what he called 'traditional' and 'modern' capitalism.¹²⁴ In modern capitalism, said Weber, employers use the practice of pricing jobs according to different rates and they do this in order to obtain as much from the worker as possible. In cases where high profits prevailed over heavy losses or where employers sought to speed up production, piece rates in modern capitalism added incentives for workers to earn more by increasing the intensity of their work. This benefited employers and workers at the same time since it maximized profits and wages. But, in traditional capitalism, raising piece rates had the effect of creating less rather than more incentive to work. According to Weber, 'the worker reacted to the increase by decreasing the amount of work.'¹²⁵ In traditional capitalism, therefore, 'the opportunity to earn more was less attractive than that of working less' since the traditional worker 'did not ask how much can they earn in a day if they do as much as possible? Instead, they asked: how much must I work in order to earn the wages which I earned before and which take care of my traditional needs?'¹²⁶

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 52.

¹²² Ibid., p. 52.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 51. Weber stated it this way: 'Truly what is here preached is not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but a peculiar ethic. The infraction of its rules is treated not as foolishness but as forgetfulness of duty.'

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 59–60.

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 59–60.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 59–60.

While traditionalism had existed previously in China, India and, briefly, in the Europe of the Middle Ages, in all these cases 'the particular spirit was lacking.'¹²⁷

Calvinism and Capitalism

Next, Weber turned his attention to looking at the origins of religious ideas and the role played by John Calvin in the formation of the capitalist spirit. John Calvin was a Protestant reformer whose work came to prominence in the sixteenth century. Calvin had studied theology and religion in France in the early half of the sixteenth century and had there developed an interest in an ecclesiastical career. In 1534, Calvin took a critical stance toward Catholic theology for its failure to stress the rejection of worldly pleasures and for its permissive doctrine of salvation. Rooted in Catholic thought was the idea that the path to salvation was clearly marked in the cycle of atonement, confession and forgiveness. Calvin thought that Catholic teaching was too tolerant and he put forward a salvation theology that was much more restrictive. Shortly thereafter, Calvin joined the Protestant reform movement in France and began to devise a Protestant theology.¹²⁸ After careful study of the Bible, he believed that he had discovered a series of restrictive regulations related to worldly activity and, as a result, began to stress a strict interpretation of the Bible. After settling in Geneva, Calvin taught and wrote on theological matters until his work began to have an impact in Western Europe, especially on the development of Protestant doctrine. Eventually, Calvin's ideas began to spread more widely throughout Europe, and influenced Protestant religious teaching by laying stress on the restrictive rules regarding personal freedoms and the Protestant attitude toward the world. The Protestant reforms introduced by Calvin signaled a serious shift in religious ideas and brought on a wave of reform which was unparalleled in its anti-humanist response.¹²⁹

After working with Calvin's theological writings, Weber focused on what he thought was the center of Calvinist religious reform. This involved a body of ideas known as the doctrine of predestination, which was based on four essential decrees. The first preached that before the world began God had divided all humanity into two classes of persons: the saved and the damned. To those who had been elected to be saved, God gave everlasting life, salvation and eternal grace. To those who were condemned, however, God withheld salvation and gave everlasting death and dishonor.¹³⁰ Second was the decree which preached that no believer should or could know their fate until it was revealed to them upon death. Since

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 52-3.

¹²⁸ See Gordon Marshall, *Presbyteries and Profits: Calvinism and the Development of Capitalism in Scotland, 1560-1707*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

¹²⁹ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1956.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

'the elect differ externally in no way from the damned,' Calvin had claimed that no physical signs or marks distinguished the elect from the damned.¹³¹ Third was the decree which stated that nothing could be done to relieve, forgive or reverse the decrees; no priest, no prayer, no sacrament and no worldly forgiveness by confession or communion.¹³² Fourth, Calvin claimed that God had abandoned all but the elect since, in Calvin's view, Christ had endured suffering only for the elect.¹³³

In order to contain the anxiety resulting from the decrees, Calvin imposed two basic obligations on believers. First, he stated that believers had an absolute duty to assume they were among the elect, thus eliminating any need for second guessing about whether they were saved or damned. Second, believers were obliged to stave off personal doubt about salvation since any personal misgiving was seen as a loss of faith in God. In addition to this, Calvin introduced two uncompromising restrictions forbidding any reversal or exemption from the doctrine of predestination: (i) however one's fate was decided by God, there would be no hope of appeal and no possibility of change through traditional prayer, supplication or sacraments. (ii) God was transcendent and could not be called upon or approached, and thus was out of reach. All of Calvin's injunctions stood in dramatic contrast to Catholic theology. In the Catholic Church, believers are able to redeem themselves of sin and to undo past error and transgression through penance and prayer.

Weber went on to outline two broad effects of the doctrine. On the one hand, he reasoned that it created a 'feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness' in Protestants and took away 'the most important thing in their life – the hope of eternal salvation.'¹³⁴ As a result, he maintained, the Protestant believer had been put into a state of internal anxiety so that the first and most pressing question became: 'am I one of the elect?'¹³⁵ Since no direct answer was obtainable, it had the effect of placing the individual on his or her own in religious matters. Second, Weber pointed out that in denying Protestants the opportunity to beseech God through prayer or sacrament, Calvin's doctrine created a crisis of faith, and the question for Protestants became: 'how can I interpret my relationship to God?'¹³⁶ Since there was no direct answer to the question, Weber maintained that the feeling of abandonment and the withdrawal of religious support created a new form of self-reflection in Protestants. For one thing, Protestants had to invent a way of being with themselves which would create peace of mind and, at the same time, proclaim worthiness in the face of a severe

131 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 110.

132 Ibid., p. 104.

133 Ibid., pp. 104–6.

134 Ibid., pp. 104–6.

135 Ibid., p. 110.

136 Wolfgang Schluchter, 'Weber's Sociology of Rationalism and Typology of Religious Rejection of the World,' in S. Whimster and S. Lash (eds), *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1987, pp. 92–115.

religious doctrine. Second, Weber thought that anxiety over salvation produced such insecurity that it led to the absence of solidarity, not only with and among other Protestants, but with the external world itself – and this created the need to compensate in the form of internal calculation and cunning against the world. Feelings of separateness and isolation, Weber argued, were manifested in a lack of trust of others and in an attitude of the individual against the world. This eventually led to the development of the principle *sola fide*, which means faith in solitude or 'faith alone.'¹³⁷

As Protestants adjusted to the decrees, they became more individualized and this altered their relationship to the everyday world and to the social community in several ways. First, by eliminating the link to the world provided by sacraments and confession, the decrees warned against trust in friendship and aid in the world.¹³⁸ Second, in proclaiming that God was out of reach, Protestants had no one to turn to to demonstrate their faith since all contact with God and priests was withdrawn. In addition, feelings of isolation and abandonment were intensified by the requirements of worldly asceticism, since asceticism required that the world be renounced with inner resistance. This tended to close off most avenues of action, with one exception – the obligation to combat self-doubt with hard work. In fact, Protestants were exhorted to accept as a duty and a calling the certainty of their possible election and 'the daily struggle of life.'¹³⁹

Weber reasoned that Protestants, having only one avenue of action to combat anxiety and loneliness, threw themselves into worldly work. In this way, worldly work became a spring to action. In one way, work functioned to relieve self-doubt and self-denial in daily life. But, in another way it had the unanticipated effect of conferring the feeling of grace since rigorous self-denial in work put Protestants in touch with their morality and purified their presence in the world. The strenuous activity of drawing oneself together and the exercise of collecting one's wits in the face of external anxiety, helped stave off the feeling of damnation and, at the same time, created the belief that one 'earns' a state of grace on a daily basis through inner conviction, conscious laboring and self-control.

The relationship between austere self-control and the attitude of resistance against worldly pleasure tended to increase the Protestant's belief in the 'economic' nature of 'peace of mind' and in the relationship between 'earnings' and mental well-being. This gave the concept of 'pulling oneself together' and of 'confronting oneself with self control' a positive valuation since it 'earned' periodic relief from damnation and brought the Protestant closer to the feeling of grace. The Protestant defense of asceticism, hard work and separateness earned the believer a dispensation from damnation and a temporary feeling of being closer to God. The daily struggle of self-control and self-denial had the effect of creating 'contempt' for others who

¹³⁷ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 80.

¹³⁸ Schluchter, 'Weber's Sociology of Rationalism,' p. 106.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

lacked the outward signs of internal discipline, leading to an intolerance toward the weaknesses of others. As Weber pointed out, this 'penetrated social relations with sharp brutality,' since Protestants could neither trust in the world nor in others.¹⁴⁰ This tended to result in an inner conviction of 'if I am damned, so are you,' or – more colloquially – 'damn you!'

The Link between Salvation and Work and between Religious Teaching and the Commercial Spirit

Weber went on to assert that there were two broad links between Protestant teaching and commercial activity: first, between the question of salvation and worldly work; and second, between religious articles of faith and the development of the commercial spirit. In the first case, Weber thought there was a link between the withdrawal of salvation and the emergence of self-denial. He believed, in fact, that the elimination of attainable salvation was at the root of Protestant self-denial and asceticism. He demonstrated this by drawing a comparison with Catholicism. In the Catholic Church, the path to salvation is clearly marked in the cycle of atonement and confession; the possibility of attaining salvation by renewal of belief is always held out to the believer. Rooted in Catholic thought and salvation is the concept of forgiveness of human weakness, and this is reflected in the 'cycle of sin, repentance and atonement followed by renewed sin.'¹⁴¹ In Catholicism one can earn salvation through good works, whereas this is not possible in Protestantism. Weber reasoned that this created two related responses in the Protestant believer: first, there developed the idea that intense worldly asceticism was to be pursued as an end in itself, since it tended to separate Protestants from others and at the same time provided a worldly substitute for grace. Second, toil and hard work became associated with a method for eliminating doubt about whether one was a member of the elect.

In connecting the emergence of self-denial with the loss of salvation, Weber believed he had found a link between the ideas of predestination and asceticism. Asceticism taught that a state of self-discipline was attainable through strict self-denial and that, through this, the individual would attain a higher state. Since Protestant commercial activity was permeated with self-denying actions of prudence, frugality and thrift, Weber felt he had found a link between Protestant religious teaching and the work ethic. Further, since a puritanical attitude toward work coupled with self-denial increased the likelihood of amassing wealth, the attainment of wealth became a sign that one had been successful in worldly activity. The Protestant equation became one of believing that success in commercial activity through hard work and self-denial must be a way the believer can interpret his or her relation to God and thus feel closer to

140 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 122.

141 Ibid., p. 117.

salvation. Wealth, therefore, became the basis for interpreting one's relationship to God.

In addition to this, Weber believed he had found the link between the Protestant commercial spirit and Protestant articles of secular religious faith. What was so unique about Protestantism, according to Weber, was that whereas all other forms of religious devotion were accompanied by a rejection of everyday life, Protestantism had introduced a thoroughgoing regulation of everyday life, especially in worldly work. In this distinction lay the difference between monastic asceticism and Protestant commercial asceticism. While monastic asceticism requires believers to isolate themselves from the world at large and reject the world as a form of temptation, Protestant asceticism encouraged believers to practice self-denial in the world. This led to an unprecedented asceticism in worldly acts which had previously been restricted to spiritual activity. Accordingly, Weber was able to identify two historical types of asceticism: otherworldly asceticism and innerworldly asceticism.¹⁴² Both reject the world, but for different reasons. Otherworldly asceticism renounces the world because it presents temptation. Here, salvation is sought after by a path to the otherworldly through religious devotion and self-denial. Otherworldly asceticism requires formal withdrawal from the world, 'from social and psychological ties with the family, from the possession of worldly goods, and from political, economic, artistic, and erotic activities; in short, from all creaturely interests.'¹⁴³ Innerworldly asceticism, on the other hand, requires believers to focus their activities in the world, on the understanding that the world is the individual's 'responsibility and that they have the obligation to transform it in accordance with an ascetic ideal.'¹⁴⁴ In this view, confronting oneself with self-control is the basic way of being in the world. The innerworldly ascetics thus see the world in terms of a test – devised by God of their ability to resist temptation, in which each individual becomes an 'elect instrument of God' to perform good works on earth in a life of toil based on self-denial.

Innerworldly asceticism encouraged Protestants to practice self-denial in the world and to separate themselves from others in their own minds. Using this strategy of self-control to thwart salvation anxiety, Protestant believers could economize their energies in two related respects. First, they could conduct their lives so as to devote their energies to the rational order of work and the rational control of themselves. This would lead to a prudent scheduling of the work day and a judicious expenditure of time. Second, in their thoughts they could conduct their lives so as to devote their energies to God in the form of self-denial and to prove themselves worthy in the hope that it draws God's attention. Based on this reasoning, the believer assumes that personal worth springs from self-denial and

142 Ibid., pp. 541–4.

143 Ibid., p. 542.

144 Ibid., p. 542.

that self-denial brings redemption. This hope, combined with worldly asceticism and the focusing of one's energies toward work, creates the inner asceticism necessary for capitalist activity.

Weber thought he had established a third link. This was between the meaning of 'good works' and the feeling of righteousness. To do worldly work, Protestants had to summon up immense self-control and muster the conviction that work in any case would be to one's credit.¹⁴⁵ This brought about a complete transformation in the Catholic doctrine of 'salvation by works.'¹⁴⁶ In Catholic theology, 'salvation by works' was accepted if one lived an ethical life, at least on the whole. 'Good works' were calculated at the end of one's life rather than being seen as a succession of individual acts throughout one's entire life. In the Catholic view, as long as good works outweighed sins, salvation was generally believed to be assured. In contrast, Protestant doctrine required 'not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system.' Weber maintained that the Protestant doctrine of salvation by works eliminated the more humanistic 'cycle of Catholic sin, repentance and atonement followed by more sin.'¹⁴⁷

Weber maintained that this led Protestants to elevate to systematic pursuit a method of conduct designed to achieve an uninterrupted chain of good works. But this view meant only those who supervised their lives with continuous conscious alertness and internal vigilance could achieve such works. This, stated Weber, led to the development of a new kind of asceticism different from monastic withdrawal from the world. Instead of being directed to otherworldly pursuits, Protestant asceticism brought action under constant rational planning, self-control, and careful evaluation of consequences. Based as it was on the constant vigilance against worldly pleasure and enjoyment, Protestant asceticism had the consequence of bringing about a separation of the individual from two different levels of experience: first, it separated the individual from the world ethically since Protestants felt compelled to surpass worldly morality by pervading everyday life with self-control and discipline; and second, it separated the individual from the social community at large since social relations were 'penetrated with sharp brutality.'¹⁴⁸

Asceticism, Capitalism and the Transformation of the 'Calling'

Next, Weber turned his attention to looking at the question of the 'calling' and its relation to capitalism. The concept of the 'calling' can be traced back to Catholic doctrine of the Middle Ages and essentially refers to being called to a 'life task' of serving God in a vocation by performing ethical acts of devotion. By the seventeenth century, the concept of the

145 Weber alludes to the idea of faith as being the theological precursor to the commercial concept of credit. See Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 115.

146 Ibid., p. 116.

147 Ibid., p. 117.

148 Ibid., p. 122.

'calling' had taken on a major role in reformation theology due to the influence of Luther. In Catholic theology after Luther, the concept of the 'calling' denoted service to God in the form of religious duties which were above those of the everyday secular world. Later, the term took on the exclusive meaning of renouncing the temporal world for monastic life. This was based on the idea that the temporal world of experience was valueless in relation to the spiritual world.

Weber pointed out that as soon as the concept of the 'calling' appears within Protestant theology, it takes on a new meaning. In contrast to Catholic theology, Protestants interpreted the 'calling' to signify service to worldly, rather than otherworldly duties. This, of course, had the effect of investing the temporal world with value. Weber highlighted the fact that, while Luther was the first to develop the significance of the concept of the 'calling' for church life, it was with Calvin that the concept began to undergo transformation. This occurred, Weber reasoned, as soon as the concept of 'activity in the world' became subject to Protestant scrutiny. In early church history, activity in the world was viewed as degrading and secular. But, because it was considered necessary to life, the church tended to view it as morally neutral. The theological point of departure came with the introduction of the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide*.¹⁴⁹ *Sola fide*, which essentially means practicing one's faith alone or in solitude, stood in sharp contrast to the Catholic concept of *consilia evangelica* whose equivalent is 'the church council.' The difference between the two concepts of faith and church life was dramatic. On the one hand, the Catholic attitude of *consilia evangelica* was that religious faith took place collectively and was communal in nature so far as it was related to others in the social and religious context of the church. On the other hand, the Protestant attitude was one of religious individualism and personal conscience, or *sola fide*. With the introduction of *sola fide*, the renunciation of everyday life for monastic withdrawal not only lost its significance as a vehicle of faith and moral purpose among Protestants, its personal justification as an act before God was diminished as well.¹⁵⁰ While Catholic thought defined faith as a withdrawal from the everyday world by emphasizing the other-worldly, Protestantism gave it a thoroughgoing worldly character.

Weber pointed out that the consequences of *sola fide* were clear. For the first time there was 'moral justification for worldly activity.'¹⁵¹ This shift cannot be overestimated. Combined with worldly activity, Protestant asceticism provided an intense moral focus to transforming the world through labor and self-discipline. Combined with this, the Protestant concept of the 'calling' took on a second transformation in which there was a connection between worldly activity, asceticism, and a religious justification to action. In Weber's view, this represented the first systematic

149 Ibid., pp. 80-1.

150 Ibid., pp. 80-1.

151 Ibid., p. 80.

attempt to separate the two ethical domains – worldly and otherworldly – and to claim that one could be ‘called’ to worldly economical pursuits. Weber reasoned that the introduction of the ‘calling’ into everyday life and into commerce was completely novel. No religion had united the world of the spirit with the world of everyday life in this manner and, as a result, work became equivalent to virtue. In Weber’s view, this ‘gave everyday worldly activity a religious significance, and created the conception of a ‘calling’ to commercial activities.’¹⁵²

Another related issue regarding the religious concept of ‘calling’ is the process whereby occupational pursuits – such as business and commercial activity – become transformed into an ‘internal calling’ which carries with it the strength of an inner conviction that one has been ‘called to business.’ The concept of the ‘calling’ thus indicates a transmission of ideas taking place between ethical and religious impulses in the outer world of daily life and impulses in the inner world of the conscience. The function of being ‘called’ to the commercial life must have been the psychological equivalent of being operated on by ethical and religious precepts in the form of an inner ‘calling’ which would serve as a substitute for righteousness and grace. In fact, the fulfillment of one’s worldly duty became, in Weber’s view, the only way Protestants could understand their actions as acceptable to God. The ‘calling’ of the individual was to fulfill his or her duty to God through the moral conduct of toil. In this scheme, toil became equivalent to a virtue. This brought dutiful pursuits and worldly activity center stage, and was the link between asceticism in economic activity as a worldly profession. Good Protestants who wanted to supervise their own state of grace in the world through self-control and self-regulation, were ‘called’ to commercial activity since work was seen as a secular method of attaining virtue and salvation. From this point of view, there could be no relaxation, no relief from toil because labor is an exercise in ascetic virtue, and rational behavior in a calling is taken as a sign of grace. For the Protestant, ‘the most urgent task [became] the destruction of spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment.’¹⁵³

Weber
Science

Between 1890 and 1900, Weber wrote several essays which were central to shaping his view of the purpose of the social sciences. These writings are often referred to as his methodological works, and they deal with issues of methodology and the nature of social sciences. Two of the most important being of central importance in the formation of Weber's methodology. First is his work entitled *Roscher and Knies: The Logical*

152 Ibid., p. 80.

153 Ibid., p. 119.