

Good example of essay on capitalism and the protestant ethic

[Psychology](#), [Success](#)



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According to Max Weber, the fundamental tenets of protestant religion, the seeking of worldly possessions is not condemned. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010) Rather, it is success in the commercial sphere that points individuals out to be ordained by God as the chosen, or elect. Thus, the seeking of wealth is not condemned as greed or avarice, but developing the trappings of wealth was a way to be singled out in society as the “elect”. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010) The more material success an individual had, the more evidence they had of their status as a member of the religious “elect”. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010) Thus, the wealthy were not disparaged as “greedy capitalist” but “chosen ones” by God. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010) Protestants at the time believed that material wealth was a sign of divine favor. Thus, its accumulation was seen as not sinful, but an answer to the “calling” of a higher power. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010) Although the “calling” may manifest itself as collecting material goods, it is, according to Weber a spiritual calling to do what is required by God. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010)

It is the motivation for the profiteering that is key to this interpretation. Protestant capitalist have a moral obligation to do their best to accumulate wealth according to God’s plan. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010) While harboring no special desire for wealth, in and of itself, the Protestant capitalist tries to accumulate as much wealth as possible to prove that he is a willing instrument of God’s will. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010) Ultimately, the more money he accumulates, the more he proves that he has done his moral duty. In fact, the only requirement that pastimes had is that they not cost any

money. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010)

The virtue of aestheticism does dovetail nicely with the growth of capitalism.

While “called” to be a successful gainer of wealth, the Protestant is also

compelled by religious tenets to live simply and frugally. (Edles &

Appleworth, 2010) This meant that much of the capital gained by the

Protestant went back into his business dealings. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010)

The accumulation and use of capital is especially effective early in a

capitalist cycle, so the Protestant Ethic meant ideal circumstances for

capitalism to prosper. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010)

Once established, the capitalistic ideals set forth by the religious leanings of

early Protestants, capitalism thrived from that point on. (Dorius & Baker,

2012) Capitalist ideals, such as specialized labor, were justified through the

religious ethic related to the “calling.” (Dorius & Baker, 2012) Also the

virtue of hard work among the working class, without the promise of earthly

reward aided early capitalist growth. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) It was

considered sacrilegious to question one’s working conditions. (Dorius &

Baker, 2012) In fact, the rougher those conditions, the better the Protestant

worker felt in overcoming them and completing their “calling” for God.

(Dorius & Baker, 2012) Thus it was that early laborers were less concerned

with the fruits of their labor, but by the process by which those fruits were

attained. (Dorius & Baker, 2012)

Capitalism, once firmly established, caused those who were religious to take

a second look at the merits of being successful businessmen. (Edles &

Appleworth, 2010) The edicts of aesthetic living made the accumulation of

worldly goods suspect in the minds of the religiously devout. The religious

began to question the true motives of the wealthy, and began to view “ too much” worldly success as sinful and in conflict with the precepts of Protestantism. (Edles & Appleworth, 2010)

Despite such criticism, the spirits of capitalism has been irrevocable linked to the Protestant ethic. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) Recent attempts have been made to empirically measure this connection. In fact, a 2004 study concluded that Protestant-Majority counties have to worst work ethic when compared to other nations. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) The counter to this argument is the fact that capitalism would remain the supreme mode of production despite challenges from other modes such a Communism. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) Having survived enlightenment and the advent of Communism, some have argued that capitalism has merely outlived its connection to the Protestant Ethic. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) While this may be true, it does not refute the fact that the Protestant religious ideals of early European-Americans inspired them to achieve economic growth at an unprecedented level. (Dorius & Baker, 2012)

Capitalism in itself has become the motivating factor behind its own perpetuity. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) No longer is it necessary or even desirable for the successful capitalist to justify his own success in the terms of religious calling. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) The modern capitalist can view the accumulation of wealth through other theories. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) One such theory is that success is given to those who deserve in that they have superior intelligence, or drive or work ethic. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) Their success therefore is evidence of their own superiority. (Dorius & Baker, 2012) These people differ from early Protestants only in that they attribute

their achievements to themselves, rather than to God.

The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism is considered a seminal work in the nascent field of Sociology. It offers a large scale explanation for an observable social phenomenon: the success of early Americans in the economy. As such, the theory and the writing represent one of the earliest attempts to create such a theory.

Work Cited

Dorius, S. & Baker, W. (2012) " The Spirit of Capitalism, Economic Development, and National Wealth" Retrieved from Population Studies Center website. Retrieved November 17th 2013 from: <http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/pubs/pdf/rr12-771.pdf>

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