The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

I. Points covered in this lecture:
- “Capitalism”: what is it?
- The “spirit” of capitalism
- Economic “traditionalism”
- Protestantism and capitalism

II. Summarizing
What is ‘Capitalism’?

Profit-seeking
Greed
Money-making
(Weber’s examples, pp. 20-1)
The Spirit of *Modern Capitalism I*

1) Nations: Endless economic growth
2) Individuals: Desire to become ever richer
3) Dedication to work
The Spirit of Modern Capitalism II

Acquisition of money is:

a) a ‘duty’ (Benjamin Franklin)

b) an ‘end in itself’ (don’t squander money in consumption – ‘asceticism’)

c) the ‘purpose of life’ and a ‘systematic’ pursuit

(Weber, pp. 14-17).
The Spirit of Modern Capitalism III

‘[W]e provisionally employ the phrase spirit of modern capitalism to refer to the particular frame of mind that ... strives systematically and rationally in a calling for legitimate profit’ (ibid., p. 27).
Economic Traditionalism I

Workers:

‘With a maximum of ease and a minimum of effort, how is the customary wage to be maintained?’

‘Traditional needs’
Economic Traditionalism II

Traditionalism amongst workers
(pp. 22-5)

Traditionalism amongst capitalists
(pp. 26-9)
Whence the Spirit of Capitalism?

Protestant Belief:
1) ‘Calling’ (Martin Luther, 1483-1546) (‘This-worldly’ vs. ‘other-worldly’ work)
2) Predestination (John Calvin, 1509-64)
The Legacy of Protestantism

The ‘steel-hard casing’ (‘iron cage’) – capitalism without religious girding

(pp. 18-19)
Marx’s ‘Preface’ (1859):

‘It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness’.

Weber (p. 19): (religious) ideas determine economic development (?)
Wood and Weber

Points of agreement:

a) Historical discontinuity (modern capitalism vs. previous types of ‘capitalism’ and non-capitalist societies)

b) Origin and spread of capitalism are distinct
Wood and Weber (cont.)

Points of disagreement:

a) Location of capitalism’s origin
b) Social class associated with the rise of capitalism (partial agreement: which class was not heavily involved)
c) Role of (religious) ideas in development of capitalism
Critique of Weber

1) Evidence I (Franklin)
2) Evidence II (Protestant theologians and ministers)
3) Evidence III (signs of salvation)
4) Relationship between Protestantism and capitalism
Word list

p. 14: beget; p. 15: catechism
p. 16: avarice; proclivities; utilitarian
p. 18: bland; p. 25: ostracism
p. 33: turpitude; p. 31: harried
p. 56: synod; p. 57: wrath